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The Uncommon Reader

Edited by Alice S. Morris
With an introductory essay
by V. S. Pritchett

An original and distinguished collection of contemporary short stories

Dylan Thomas Anthony West
Flannery O'Connor
Hortense Calisher Colette
Terry Southern Paul Bowles
Donald Barthelme
John Steinbeck James Purdy
Nadine Gordimer
Isak Dinesen Susan Sontag
Jorge Luis Borges
Eugene Ionesco
&20 more

ALICE S. MORRIS is a native of New York City; she has been Literary Editor of HARPER'S BAZAAR since 1952, during which time she introduced the work of an extraordinary number of talented writers to the American reading public. Miss Morris was asked to teach at Columbia University in 1963 and has since lectured there in literature and creative writing. She is a contributor to THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, as well as other periodicals. The stories in THE UNCOMMON READER have been chosen for both their excellence and their variety. This is in every sense an original collection.

Sept. 1973

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THE UNCOMMON READER

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Introductory Essay by V. S. Pritchett

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For Luke and Miranda

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Preface

Somewhere recently I read a complaint that the term "short story" was arbitrary and ambiguous, designating merely a *length* of fiction, without regard to whether it was fantasy or fable, realism or science fiction, or whether it might be classed as sociological, satirical, psychological, philosophical, or metaphysical. But it is precisely the variousness of approach and manner permissible in the short story—as in the novel, or the poem (may it not be a sonnet, an ode, a ballade, a villanelle, or vers libre?)—that is its life-spring, its infinite source of verve, unexpectedness and range. Strait-jacketing preconceptions of what a short story ought to be go unheeded by the bold writer, and the inquisitive reader.

The thirty-five stories collected here are from among the hundred and eighty-six that have appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* since my literary editorship began. Thus the customary dilemma facing the anthologist—that of choice—was in my case double double-horned: I had to choose from what I had already chosen, to make distinctions between first loves that had become enduring attachments. Further, the size of the projected book constrained me to use only one story by those authors I had published several or many times over, and to exclude entirely other authors extremely painful to pass by. Among the latter are Walter Clemons, Walter de la Mare, Alfred Duhrssen, Romain Gary, Gerald J. Goldberg, MacDonald Harris, Franz Kafka, Alwyn Lee, Mary-Carter Roberts, James Stern, Turgeniev and Eudora Welty.

Within these book-imposed and self-imposed limits, I drew up the list of those stories I felt this anthology could least do without. It was only after this decisive step was taken that I made the twin discoveries that fifteen countries were represented, and almost every conceivable form of the short story. This was the purest "happening." Neither an international cross-section of the modern short story, nor a compendium of diversity in its techniques, had been a forethought in compiling the book. That it has, to some extent, turned out to be both, is nonetheless pleasing. The eclectic character of the collection may serve to point up that the short story that attains to art transcends categories, nations, and regions, and speaks with universal clarity to any open ear.

In the present collection, Donald Barthelme's parodic tour-de-force ("Florence Green is 81"); Ted Hughes' frozen outpost of episode ("Snow"); Pierre Gascar's delicate, devious summoning up of Africa ("Les Chasses d'Ethiopie"); Paddy Chayefsky's bare, profound and chilling case history ("The Giant Fan"); Cyril Connolly's comic morality tale ("Covetousness"); Hortense Calisher's reminiscent observation on the immeasurable inconsistencies of Time ("Time, Gentlemen!"); John Steinbeck's updating of the supernatural tale ("The Affair at 7 rue de M—"); Sylvia Berkman's and Flannery O'Connor's subtle, scrupulous probing of unequal souls in fleeting and dramatic confrontations ("Teachers," "Good Country People"); Anthony West's Greek tragedy in modern dress ("Markie and the Snobs"); and Isak Dinesen's morality in medieval dress ("The Ring")—these and the other stories in *The Uncommon Reader* have only in common, or in uncommon, the intent of the author: in each case to create a work that holds and gives off a particular light.

"Every force has its form" is a saying of the Shakers. And the forces here in play—whether they spring from an initial impulse to tease the mind or to regale it, to provide the "shock of recognition" or that of a wild surmise, to intensify perception of the commonplace or initiate perception of the unfamiliar—have I think found their forms.

* * *

I wish to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Nancy White, the editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, and to her predecessor, the late Carmel Snow, for their generosity and trust in allowing me unusual latitude in the selection of fiction.

Alice S. Morris

Short Stories

by V. S. Pritchett

For a long time the short story was the poor relation of the novel. It was the chapter left over, the anecdote to be tossed off in a spare moment. Even in the hands of genius, like those of Maupassant and Chekhov, the short story was thought to be the *pis aller* of writers who would have written novels if they had only known how, for Chekhov wasted two or three years trying and Maupassant is a failure as a novelist. We now think differently: the originating genius of Poe in America, of these French and Russian writers and (very late) of Kipling in Britain, has turned out to be decisive and, in this century, writers have had the excitement of a new, intensely individual prose art at their disposal. It is a hybrid. It owes much to the quickness, the objectivity and cutting of the cinema; it owes much to the poet on the one hand and the newspaper reporter on the other; something also to the dramatic compression of the theatre, and everything to the restlessness, the alert nerve, the scientific eye and the short breath of contemporary life. It is the art of the short expectation of life. It fulfills Poe's demand that works of art should be short and immediate in effect. It succeeds on condition that it gets off on the right foot and bears in mind what is said to be the motto of the Bank of England: never explain, never apologize.

If the short story is natural to our age, it makes one crucial requirement which many young writers who attempt this form fatally lack. Maxim Gorki, who inherited a natural power of storytelling from his grandmother, makes it clear in his autobiography that without personality—possibly without the right grandmother—the storyteller is sunk. He describes how his grandmother kept the simple Russian sailors on a ship captivated by her tales. One was about a goblin who ran a splinter in his paw and screamed out, "I can't bear it, little mice, it hurts so much." And, says Gorki, "she lifted her own foot in her hands and rocked comically, screwing up her face as if she actually felt the pain."

The good storyteller knows that, orally or writing, he is putting on a personal, individual act. A novelist can dispense with that. Trollope had almost no personality; quite a number of excellent noveltists have an average personality common to them all. The novelist is able, for long periods, to rely on the cumulative weight and diffusion of his material. Not so the storyteller. A miniaturist like Colette, as delicate as a cat; a dramatist of nervous alarm and the inner precipice like Elizabeth Bowen; a reporter like Hemingway; intrepid travelers into the tropics of character like Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers owe the indispensable shock they give to the reader to their personality.

Moralists used to condemn even the greatest novels as dangerous, drugging daydreams. There was *something* in this argument. Their length, their inclusiveness, their shapelessness—despite all the efforts of Henry James and Flaubert—were bemusing. The story, on the other hand, wakes the reader up. Not only that; it answers the primitive craving for art, the wit, paradox and beauty of shape, the longing to see a dramatic pattern and significance in our experience, the desire for the electric shock. The modern reader is longing for a revival of the tale which the novel, in its complexity and sophistication, has so thoroughly repressed in the brief two hundred and fifty years of its life. But in stressing the "art" of the short story, I do not mean to convey something precious or nicely removed from life. Chekhov's stories form a passionate, indignant yet scientific record of Russian life in his time. Maupassant has described the Normandy peasant forever. All conscience spreads entangled from Conrad's tale of the Captain who hides the refugee in his cabin; all the fatality attending the rebel and the soldier is in Frank O'Connor's tale of the Irishmen playing cards with their British prisoners, while they wait orders to execute them. These stories are not missing chapters or scenarios for novels. Expanded, they would "explain," "apologize" and fail to pierce.

The modern nervous system is keyed up. The very collapse of standards, conventions and values, which has so bewildered the impersonal novelist, has been the making of the story writer who can catch any piece of life as it flies and make his personal performance out of it.

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Boa Constrictor and Rabbit

by ANTON CHEKHOV

Pyotr Semyonych, a played-out, bald-headed individual in a velvet dressing gown with crimson tassels, stroked his fluffy side whiskers and went on:

And here, *mon cher,* is, if you please, another method. It is the subtlest, cleverest and most venomous of them all, and the one most dangerous to husbands. Only psychologists and connoisseurs of the feminine heart can apply it. In using it the *conditio sine qua non* is patience, patience, and patience. It won't suit anyone who doesn't know how to wait and persist. According to this method, if you're trying to seduce a man's wife, you should keep as far away from her as possible. As soon as you begin to find her attractive, you stop visiting her, you meet her as seldom as possible, and that for a moment only, and you deprive yourself of the pleasure of talking to her. You act on her at a distance. It's all a matter of a kind of hypnosis. She must not see you but feel you, just as a rabbit feels the gaze of the boa constrictor. You hypnotize her not with your eyes, but with the poison of your tongue, and, what is more, the best channel is the husband himself.

For example, I am in love with N.N. and I want to win her. Somewhere, in a club or at the theatre, I run into her husband.

"And how is your spouse?" I ask him casually. "A charming woman, let me tell you! I like her immensely. Immensely, devil take it!"

"Hm . . . What is it about her that fascinates you so?" asks the gratified husband.

"She's a most charming, exquisite creature; she can rouse a stone and make it fall in love with her! But you husbands are clods. It's only during the honeymoon that you appreciate your wives. Can't you see that your wife is an ideal woman? Recognize it, and rejoice that fate gave you a wife like that! Such women are badly needed in this day and generation, just that sort!"

"What is it about her that you find so unusual?" the husband inquires.

"Why, she is a beauty, full of grace and life, candid, poetical, sincere, and at the same time enigmatic. Such women, once they fall in love with you, love you deeply, ardently . . ."

And more of the same thing. That very night the husband, going to bed, will be sure to say to his wife: "I saw Pyotr Semyonych today. He spoke most enthusiastically about you. He was enraptured. According to him, you're a beauty, and you're graceful and enigmatic . . . and you are capable of loving in some extraordinary way. He certainly had a lot to say about you . . . ha-ha . . ."

After that, still without seeing *her,* I seek out her husband.

"By the way, old man . . ." I say to him, "yesterday a painter I know came to see me. Some prince or other had given him an order to paint the head of a typical Russian beauty. He's to get two thousand for it. He asked me to look out for a model for him. I wanted to suggest that he turn to your wife, but couldn't bring myself to do it. But your wife would be just the type. That lovely head of hers! It's a damn shame that such a wonderful model escapes the artist's eye. A damn shame!"

No husband would be so lacking in gallantry as not to repeat this to his wife. In the morning the wife spends a long time before her mirror and thinks: "Where did he get the idea that I have a typically Russian face?"

After that, every time she looks in the mirror she thinks of me. Meanwhile, my accidental meetings with her husband continue. Following one of these encounters, the husband comes home and starts staring at his wife's face.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asks.

"Well, that queer character Pyotr Semyonych has discovered that one of your eyes is darker than the other. For the life of me, I can't see it."

The wife is before the mirror again. She scrutinizes herself for a long time and reflects: "Yes, the left eye does seem somewhat darker than the right. . . . No, it's the right eye that seems darker than the left. . . . But maybe it just seemed so to him."

After the eighth or ninth encounter, the husband says to the wife: "I saw Pyotr Semyonych at the theatre. He apologizes for not coming to see you: he has no time. Says that he's awfully busy. It seems to me that he hasn't come to see us in about four months. I scolded him for it, but he excused himself, saying that he wouldn't visit us until he had finished a certain piece of work."

"But when does he expect to be through with it?" asks the wife.

"He says not before a year or two. And what kind of work can that trifler be doing, devil take him. He's a queer one, by Jove! He kept on badgering me like a madman: 'Why doesn't your wife go on the stage? With such an attractive appearance, such intelligence and sensitiveness, it is a sin for her to be just a housewife. She ought to give up everything,' says he, 'and go where her inner voice summons her. Ordinary demands don't exist for such women. Natures like hers should not be bound by time and space.' "

Of course, the wife has only the vaguest idea of what all this highfalutin talk means, but she melts, she is breathless with rapture.

"What nonsense!" she says, pretending indifference. "And what else did he say?"

" 'If I weren't so busy,' says he, 'I'd take her away from you.' 'Well,' I say, 'take her, I'm not going to fight a duel over her.' 'You don't understand her!' he shouts. 'It is essential to understand her! She's an exceptional creature, strong, seeking a way out. It's a pity that I'm not Turgenev,' he says, 'or I'd put her in a novel.' Ha-ha. . . . He's hipped on you! 'Well,' I say to myself, 'if you were to live with her two or three years, brother, you'd sing another tune. . . .' A queer fellow!"

The poor wife ends by being consumed with the passionate desire to meet me. I am the only person who has understood her; to me alone has she so much to say! But I stubbornly persist in not calling on her and in keeping out of her way. She hasn't seen me in a long time, but my tormentingly sweet poison is working on her. The husband, yawning, transmits my remarks, and it seems to her that she hears my voice, that she sees my shining eyes.

The psychological moment arrives. One evening the husband comes home and says: "I've just met Pyotr Semyonych. He's dull, blue, down in the mouth."

"Why? What's the matter with him?"

"I can't make out. Complains that he's depressed. 'I'm lonely,' he says. 'I've no relatives, no friends, not a soul who could understand me and with whom I could really commune. No one understands me,' he says, 'and I desire one thing only: death . . .' "

"How foolish!" says the wife, but in her heart she thinks: "The poor darling! I understand him perfectly! I am lonely, too, no one understands me, except him; who but I can appreciate his state of mind?"

"Yes, a queer fellow . . ." the husband goes on. " 'What with my depression,' he says, 'I can't stay home, I spend the night walking in the public gardens.' "

The wife is in a fever. She is dying to go to the public gardens and see, if only with one eye, the man who has been able to understand her and is now so depressed. Who knows? If she were to speak to him, if she were to speak two or three words of comfort to him, perhaps he would feel better. If she were to tell him that he had a friend who understood him and valued him, perhaps he would be resurrected.

"But this is impossible . . . absurd," she says to herself. "I mustn't even think of it! I may fall in love with him, if I don't look out, and that would be stupid and ridiculous."

When her husband is asleep, she raises her fevered head, puts a finger to her lips, and reflects: what would happen if she risked leaving the house, now? Afterward she could invent a story that she had run down to the druggist, to the dentist. "I'll go," she decides.

Her plan is ready: she will leave the house by the back door and take a cab to the public gardens; once there, she will walk past him, glance at him, and then return home. Thus she will compromise neither herself nor her husband.

She dresses, quietly leaves the house and hastens to the public gardens. The place is dark, deserted. The bare trees are asleep. There's not a soul to be seen. But then she glimpses a silhouette. It must be the man. Shivering all over, beside herself, she slowly moves toward me . . . and I toward her. For a moment we stand still and peer into each other's eyes. Another moment passes in silence and . . . the rabbit drops helplessly into the boa constrictor's jaws.

—*Translated from the Russian by Avrahm Yarmolinsky*

Florence Green is 81

by DONALD BARTHELME

Dinner with Florence Green. The old babe is on a kick tonight: *I want to go to some other country,* she announces. Everyone wonders what this can mean. But Florence says nothing more: no explanation, no elaboration, after a satisfied look around the table bang! she is asleep again. The girl at Florence's right is new here and does not understand. I give her an ingratiating look (a look that says, "There is nothing to worry about, I will explain everything later in the privacy of my quarters Kathleen"). Lentils vegetate in the depths of the fourth principal river of the world, the Ob, in Siberia, 3,200 miles. We are talking about Quemoy and Matsu. "It's a matter of leading from strength. What is the strongest possible move on our part? To deny them the islands even though the islands are worthless in themselves." Baskerville, a sophomore at the Famous Writers' School in Westport, Connecticut, which he attends with the object of becoming a famous writer, is making his excited notes. The new girl's boobies are like my secretary's knees, very prominent and irritating. Florence began the evening by saying, grandly, "The upstairs bathroom leaks you know." What does Herman Kahn think about Quemoy and Matsu? I can't remember, I can't remember . . .

Oh Baskerville! you silly son of a bitch, how can you become a famous writer without first having worried about your life, is it the *right kind* of life, does it have the right people in it, is it *going well?* Instead you are be-glamoured by J. D. Ratcliff. The smallest city in the United States with a population over 100,000 is Santa Ana, California, where 100,350 citizens nestle together in the Balboa blue Pacific evenings worrying about their lives. I am a young man but very brilliant, very ingratiating. I adopt this ingratiating tone because I can't help myself (for fear of boring you). I edit with my left hand a small magazine, very scholarly, very brilliant, called THE JOURNAL OF TENSION REDUCTION (social-psychological studies, learned disputation, letters-to-the-editor, anxiety in rats). Isn't that distasteful? certainly it is distasteful but if Florence Green takes her money to another country who will pay the printer? answer me that. From an article in THE JOURNAL OF TENSION REDUCTION: *"One source of concern in the classic encounter between patient and psychoanalyst is the patient's fear of boring the doctor."* The doctor no doubt is also worrying about his life, unfolding with ten minutes between hours to smoke a cigarette in and wash his hands in. Reader, you who have already been told more than you want to know about the river Ob, 3,200 miles long, in Siberia, we have roles to play, thee and I: you are the doctor (washing your hands between hours), and I, I am, I think, the nervous dreary patient. I am free associating, brilliantly, brilliantly, to put you into the problem. Or for fear of boring you: which? THE JOURNAL OF TENSION REDUCTION is concerned with everything from global tensions (drums along the Ob) to intrapersonal relations (Baskerville and the new girl). There is, we feel, too much tension in the world, I myself am a perfect example, my stomach is like a clenched fist. Notice the ingratiating tone here? the only way I can relax it, I refer to the stomach, is by introducing quarts of Fleischmann's Gin. Fleischmann's I have found is a magnificent source of tension-reduction, I favor the establishment of comfort stations providing free Fleischmann's on every street corner of the city of Santa Ana, California, and all other cities. Be serious, can't you?

The new girl is a thin thin sketchy girl with a big chest looming over the gazpacho and black holes around her eyes that are very promising. Surely when she opens her mouth toads will pop out. I am tempted to remove my shirt and show her my trim midsection sporting chiseled abdominals, my superior shoulders and brilliantly-developed pectoral-latissimus tie-in. Jackson called himself a South Carolinian, and his biographer, Amos Kendall, recorded his birthplace in Lancaster County, S.C.; but Parton has published documentary evidence to show that Jackson was born in Union County, N.C., less than a quarter mile from the South Carolina line. Jackson is my great hero even though he had, if contemporary reports are to be believed, lousy lats. I am also a weightlifter and poet and admirer of Jackson and the father of one catatonic and four miscarriages; who among you has such a record and no wife? Baskerville's difficulty not only at the Famous Writers' School in Westport, Connecticut—where they teach you how to make, I am told, prose home movies—but in every part of the world, is that he is slow. "That's a slow boy, that one," his first teacher said. "That boy is what you call *real slow,*" his second teacher said. "That's a *slow son of a bitch,*" his third teacher said. And they were right, right, entirely correct, still I learned about Andrew Jackson and catatonia, many of you walking the streets of Santa Ana, California, and all other cities know nothing about either. *"In such cases the patient sees the doctor as a highly sophisticated consumer of outré material, a connoisseur of exotic behavior. Therefore he tends to propose himself as more colorful, more eccentric (or more ill) than he really is; or he is witty, or he fantasticates."* You see? Isn't that sensible? In the magazine we run many useful and sensible pieces of this kind, portages through the whirlpool-country of the mind. In the magazine I cannot openly advocate the use of Fleischmann's Gin in tension-reduction but I did run an article titled "Alcohol Reconsidered" written by a talented soak of my acquaintance which drew many approving if carefully worded letters from secret drinkers in psychology departments all over this vast, dry and misunderstood country . . .

"That's a *slow son of a bitch,*" his third teacher remarked of him, at a meeting called to discuss the formation of a special program for Inferior Students, in which Baskerville's name had so to speak rushed to the fore. The young Baskerville, shrinking along the beach brushing sand from his dreary Texas eyes, his sad fingers gripping $20 worth of pamphlets secured by post from Joe Weider, "Trainer of Terror Fighters" (are they, Baskerville wondered, like fire fighters? do they fight terror? or do they, rather, inspire it? the latter his, Baskerville's, impossible goal), was even then incubating plans for his novel *The Children's Army* which he is attending the Famous Writers' School to learn how to write. "You will do famously, Baskerville," said the Registrar, the exciting results of Baskerville's Talent Test lying unexamined before him. "Run along now to the Cashier's Office." "I am writing doctor an immense novel to be called *The Children's Army*." (Why do I think the colored doctor's name, he with his brown hand on the red radishes, is Pamela Hansford Johnson? Why do I think?) Florence Green is a small fat girl 81 years old, old with blue legs and very rich. Rock pools deep in the earth, I salute the shrewdness of whoever filled you with Texaco! Texaco breaks my heart, Texaco is particularly poignant.

Florence Green who was not always a small fat girl once made a voyage with her husband Mr. Green on the *Graf Zeppelin*. In the grand salon, she remembers, there was a grand piano, the great pianist Mandrake the Magician was also on board but could not be persuaded to play. The reason that the Zeppelins could not use helium was, because the government of this country refused to sell helium to the owners of the Zeppelins. The title of my second book will be I believe, *Hydrogen After Lakehurst*. For the first half of the evening we heard about the problem of the upstairs bathroom: "I had a man come out and look at it, and he said it would be two hundred and twenty-five dollars for a new one. I said I didn't want a new one, I just wanted this one fixed." Shall I offer to obtain a new one for Florence, carved out of solid helium? would that be ingratiating? Does she worry about her life? "He said mine was old-fashioned and they didn't make parts for that kind any more." Now she sleeps untidily at the head of the table, except for her single, mysterious statement, delivered with the soup ("*I want to go to some other country*!"), she has said nothing about her life whatsoever . . . The diameter of the world at the Poles is 7,899.99 miles whereas the diameter of the world at the Equator is 7,926.68 miles, mark it and strike it. I am sure the colored man across from me is a doctor, he has a doctor's doctorly air of being needed and necessary. He leans into the conversation as if to say: just make *me* Secretary of State and then you will see some action. "I'll tell you one thing, there are a hell of a lot of Chinese over there." Surely, the very kidneys of wisdom, Florence Green has only one kidney, I have a kidney stone, Baskerville was stoned by the massed faculty of the Famous Writers' School upon presentation of his first lesson: he was accused of formalism.

It is well known that Florence adores doctors, why didn't I announce myself, in the beginning, from the very first, as a doctor? Then I could say that the money was for a very important research project (use of radioactive tracers in reptiles) with very important ramifications in stomach cancer (the small intestine is very like a reptile). Then I would get the money with much less difficulty, cancer frightens Florence, the money would rain down like fallout in New Mexico. I am a young man but very brilliant, very ingratiating, I edit with my left hand a small magazine called . . . did I explain that? And you *accepted* my explanation? Her name is not really Kathleen, it is Joan Graham, when we were introduced she said "Oh are you a native of Dallas Mr. Baskerville?" No Joan baby I am a native of Bengazi sent here by the UN to ring your bells and bang your drums, that is not what I said but what I should have said, it would have been brilliant. When she asked him what he did Baskerville identified himself as an American weightlifter and poet (that is to say: *a man stronger and more lovable than other men*). "It moves," Mandrake said, pointing to the piano, and although no one else could detect the slightest movement, the force of his personality was so magical that he was not contradicted (the instrument sat in the salon, Florence says, as solidly as Gibraltar in the sea).

The man who has been settling the hash of the mainland Chinese searches the back of his neck, where there is what appears to be a sebaceous cyst (I can clear that up for you; my instrument will be a paper on the theory of games). What if Mandrake *had* played, though, what if he had seated himself before the instrument, raised his hands, and . . . what? The Principal Seas, do you want to hear about the Principal Seas? Florence has been prodded awake; people are beginning to ask questions. If not this country, then what country? Italy? "No," Florence says smiling through her diamonds, "not Italy. I've *been* to Italy. Although Mr. Green was very fond of Italy." *"To bore the doctor is to become, for this patient, a case similar to other cases; the patient strives mightily to establish his uniqueness. This is also, of course, a tactic for evading the psychoanalytic issue."*

The first thing the All-American Boy said to Florence Green at the very brink of their acquaintanceship was "It is closing time in the gardens of the West Cyril Connolly." This remark pleased her, it was a pleasing remark, on the strength of this remark Baskerville was invited again, on the second occasion he made a second remark, which was "Before the flowers of friendship faded friendship faded Gertrude Stein." Joan is like one of those marvelous VOGUE girls, a tease in a half-slip on Mykonos, bare from the belly up on the rocks. "It moves," Mandrake said, and the piano raised itself a few inches, magically, and swayed from side to side in a careful Baldwin dance. "It moves," the other passengers agreed, under the spell of posthypnotic suggestion. "It moves," Joan says, pointing at the gazpacho, which sways from side to side with a secret Heinz trembling movement. I give the soup a serious warning, couched in the strongest possible terms, and Joan grins gratefully not at me but at Pamela Hansford Johnson. The Virgin Islands maybe? "We were there in 1925, Mr. Green had indigestion, I sat up all night with his stomach and the flies, the flies were something you wouldn't believe." They are asking I think the wrong questions, the question is not where but why? "I was reading the other day that the average age of Chiang's enlisted men is thirty-seven. You can't do much with an outfit like that." This is true, I myself am thirty-seven and if Chiang must rely on men of my sort then he might as well kiss the mainland goodbye. Oh, there is nothing better than intelligent conversation except thrashing about in bed with a naked girl and Egmont Light Italic.

Despite his slowness already remarked upon which perhaps inhibited his ingestion of the splendid curriculum that had been prepared for him, Baskerville never failed to be "promoted," but on the contrary was always "promoted," the reason for this being, perhaps, that his seat was needed for another child (Baskerville then being classified in spite of his marked growth and gorgeous potential, as a child). There were some it was true who never thought he would extend himself to six feet, still he learned about Andrew Jackson, helium-hydrogen, and catatonia, where are my mother and father now? answer me that. On a circular afternoon in June 1945—it was raining, Florence says, hard enough to fill the Brazen Sea—she was sitting untidily on a chaise in the north bedroom (on the wall of the north bedroom there are twenty identically framed photographs of Florence from eighteen to eighty-one, she was a real beauty at eighteen) reading a copy of LIFE. It was the issue containing the first pictures from Buchenwald, she could not look away, she read the text, or a little of the text, then she vomited. When she recovered she read the article, but without understanding it. What did *exterminated* mean? It meant nothing, an eyewitness account mentioned a little girl with one leg thrown alive on top of a truckload of corpses to be burned. Florence was sick. She went immediately to the Greenbrier, a resort in West Virginia. Later she permitted me to tell her about the Principal Seas: the South China, the Yellow, the Andaman, the Sea of Okhotsk. . . .

"I spotted you for a weightlifter," Joan says. "But not for a poet," Baskerville replies. "What have you written?" she asks. "Mostly I make remarks," I say. "Remarks are not literature," she says. "Then there's my novel," I say, "it will be twelve years old Tuesday." "Published?" she asks. "Not finished," I say, "however it's very violent and necessary. It has to do with this Army see, made up of children, young children but I mean really well armed with M-1's, carbines, .30 and .50 calibre machine guns, 105 mortars, recoilless rifles, the whole works. The central figure is the General, who is fifteen. One day the Army appears in the city, in a park, and takes up positions. Then it begins killing the people. Do you understand?" "I don't think I'd like it," Joan says. "I don't like it either," Baskerville says, "but it doesn't make any difference that I don't like it. Mr. Henry James writes fiction as though it were a painful duty Oscar Wilde."

Does Florence worry about her life? "He said mine was old-fashioned and they didn't make parts for that kind any more." Last year Florence tried to join the Peace Corps and when she was refused, telephoned the President to complain. "I have always admired the work of the Andrews Sisters," Joan says. I feel feverish; will you take my temperature doctor? Baskerville that simple preliterate soaks up all the Taylor's New York State malmsey in reach meanwhile wondering about his Grand Design. France? Japan? "Not Japan dear, we had a lovely time there but I wouldn't want to go back now. France is where my little niece is, they have twenty-two acres near Versailles, he's a count and a bio-chemist, isn't that wonderful?" The others nod, they know what is wonderful. The Principal Seas are wonderful, the Important Lakes of the World are wonderful, the Metric System is wonderful, let us measure something together Florence Green baby. I will trade you a wall-eyed hectometer for a single golden micron. The table is hushed, like a crowd admiring 300 million dollars. Did I say that Florence has 300 million dollars? Florence Green is eighty-one with blue legs and has 300 million dollars and in 1932 was in love, airily, with a radio announcer named Norman Brokenshire, with his voice. "*Mean*while Edna Cather's husband who takes me to church, he's got a very good job with the Port, I think he does very well, he's her second husband, the first was Pete Duff who got into all that trouble, where was I? Oh yes when Paul called up and said he couldn't come because of his hernia—you heard about his hernia?—John said *he'd* come over and look at it. Mind you I've been using the *down*stairs bathroom all this time." In fact the whole history of Florence's radio listenership is of interest. In fact I have decided to write a paper called "The Whole History of Florence Green's Radio Listenership." Or perhaps, in the seventeenth century style, "The Whole and True History of Florence Green's Radio Listenership." Or perhaps . . . But I am boring you, I sense it, let me say only that she can still elicit, from her ancient larynx, the special thrilling sound used to introduce Captain Midnight . . .

The table is hushed, then, we are all involved in a furious pause, a grand parenthesis (here I will insert a description of Florence's canes. Florence's canes line a special room, the room in which her cane collection is kept. There are hundreds of them: smooth black Fred Astaire canes and rough chewed alpenstocks, blackthorns and quarterstaffs, cudgels and swagger sticks, bamboo and ironwood, maple and slippery elm, canes from Tangiers, Maine, Zurich, Panama City, Quebec, Togoland, the Dakotas and Borneo, resting in notched compartments that resemble arms racks in an armory. Everywhere Florence goes, she purchases one or more canes. Some she has made herself, stripping the bark from the green unseasoned wood, drying them carefully, applying layer on layer of a special varnish, then polishing them, endlessly, in the evenings, after dark and dinner) as vast as the Sea of Okhotsk, 590,000 square miles. I was sitting, I remember, in a German restaurant on Lexington, blowing bubbles in my seidel, at the next table there were six Germans, young Germans, they were laughing and talking. At Florence Green's here-and-now table there is a poet named Onward Christian or something whose spectacles have wide silver sidepieces rather than the dull brown horn sidepieces of true poets and weightlifters, and whose poems invariably begin: "Through all my clangorous hours . . ." I am worried about his remarks, are his remarks better than my remarks? We are elected after all on the strength of our glamorous remarks, what is he saying to her? to Joan? what sort of eyewash is he pouring in her ear? I am tempted to walk briskly over and ask to see his honorable discharge from the Famous Writers' School. What could be more glamorous or necessary than *The Children's Army*, "An army of youth/Bearing the standard of truth" as we used to sing in my fourth-grade classroom at Our Lady of the Sorrows under the unforgiving eye of Sister Scholastica who knew how many angels could dance on the head of a pin . . .

Florence I have decided is evading the life-issue. She is proposing herself as more unhappy than she really is. She has in mind making herself more interesting. She is afraid of boring us. She is trying to establish her uniqueness. She does not really want to go away. Does Onward Christian know about the Important Lakes of the World? Terminate services of employees when necessary. I terminate you, brightness that seems to know me. She proceeded by car from Tempelhof to a hotel in the American zone, registered, dined, sat in a chair in the lobby for a time observing the American lieutenant colonels and their healthy German girls, and then walked out into the street. The first German she saw was a policeman directing traffic. He wore a uniform. Florence walked out into the traffic island and tugged at his sleeve. He bent politely toward the nice old American lady. She lifted her cane, the cane of 1927 from Yellowstone, and cracked his head with it. He fell in a heap in the middle of the street. Then Florence Green rushed awkwardly into the plaza with her cane, beating the people there, men and women, indiscriminately, until she was subdued. The Forms of Address, shall I sing to you of the Forms of Address? What Florence did was what Florence did, not more or less, she was returned to this country under restraint in a military plane. "Why do you have the children kill everybody?" "Because everybody has already been killed. Everybody is absolutely dead. You and

I and Onward Christian." "You're not very sanguine." "That's true." For an earl's younger son's wife, letters commence: *Madam* . . . "We put in the downstairs bathroom when Ead came to visit us. Ead was Mr. Green's sister and she couldn't climb stairs." What about Casablanca? Santa Cruz? Funchal? Malaga? Valletta? Iraklion? Samos? Haifa? Kotor Bay? Dubrovnik? "I want to go to some *other* place," Florence says. "Somewhere where *everything is different.*" For the Talent Test, a necessary but not a sufficient condition for matriculation at the Famous Writers' School, Baskerville delivered himself of "Impressions of Akron" which began: "Akron! Akron was full of people walking the streets of Akron carrying little transistor radios which were turned on."

Florence has a Club. The Club meets on Tuesday evenings, at her huge horizontal old multi-bathroom home on Indiana Boulevard. The Club is a group of men who gather, on these occasions, to recite and hear poems in praise of Florence Green. Before you can be admitted you must compose a poem. The poems begin, usually, somewhat in this vein: "Florence Green is eighty-one/Nevertheless she's lots of fun . . ." Onward Christian's poem began "Through all my clangorous hours . . ." Florence carries the poems about with her in her purse, stapled together in an immense, filthy wad. Surely Florence Green is a vastly rich vastly egocentric old-woman nut! Six modifiers modify her into something one can think of as a nut. "But you have not grasped the living reality, the essence!" Husserl exclaims. Nor will I, ever. His examiner (was it J. D. Ratcliff?) said severely, "Baskerville, you blank round, discursiveness is not literature." "The aim of literature," Baskerville replied grandly, "is the creation of a strange object covered with fur which breaks your heart." Joan says: "I have two children." "Why did you do that?" I ask. "I don't know," she says. I am struck by the modesty of her answer. Pamela Hansford Johnson has been listening and his face jumps in what may be described as a wince. "That's a terrible thing to say," he says. And he is right, right, entirely correct, what she has said is the First Terrible Thing. We value each other for our remarks, on the strength of this remark and the one about the Andrews Sisters, love becomes possible.

I carry in my wallet an eight-paragraph General Order, issued by the adjutant of my young immaculate Army to the troops: "1) You are in this Army because you wanted to be. So you have to do what the General says. Anybody who doesn't do what the General says will be kicked out of the Army. 2) The purpose of the Army is to do what the General says. 3) The General says that nobody will shoot his weapon unless the General says to. It is important that when the Army opens fire on something everybody does it together. This is very important and anybody who doesn't do it will have his weapon taken away and will be kicked out of the Army. 4) Don't be afraid of the noise when everybody fires. It won't hurt you. 5) Everybody has enough rounds to do what the General wants to do. People who lose their rounds won't get any more. 6) Talking to people who are not in the Army is strictly forbidden. Other people don't understand the Army. 7) This is a serious Army and anybody that laughs will have his weapon taken away and will be kicked out of the Army. 8) What the General wants to do now is, find and destroy the enemy."

"I want to go somewhere where everything is different." A simple, perfect idea. The old babe demands nothing less than total other-ness. Dinner is over. We place our napkins on our lips. Quemoy and Matsu remain ours, temporarily perhaps; the upstairs bathroom drips away unrepaired; I feel the money drifting, drifting away from me. I am a young man but very brilliant, very ingratiating, I edit . . . but I explained all that. In the dim foyer I slip my hands through the neck of Joan's yellow dress. It is dangerous but it is a way of finding out everything all at once. Then Onward Christian arrives to resume his yellow overcoat. No one has taken Florence seriously, how can anyone with 300 million dollars be taken seriously? But I know that when I telephone tomorrow, there will be no answer. Iraklion? Samos? Haifa? Kotor Bay? She will be in none of these places but in another place, a place where *everything is different*. Outside it is raining. In my rain-blue Volkswagon I proceed down the rain-black street thinking, for some simple reason, of the Verdi *Requiem*. I begin to drive my tiny car in idiot circles in the street, I begin to sing the first great *Kyrie*.

Teachers

by SYLVIA BERKMAN

Allen Chapter stood before the window of the room he had just taken at Crestwick Lodge, pushing the stiff dusty curtains aside with one hand. The view he confronted was familiar; he felt a melancholy satisfaction at seeing it again—the broad tip-tilted curve of road edged on one side by a line of shops, on the other by big solid lofty trees, elms and maples, glimmering with a first frail gold in the clear October light. Obliquely opposite, the meeting house on its knoll raised its shapely steeple against the sky; the hands on the clock face pointed to three. Sunday afternoon: the village was deserted; a case of empty milk bottles beside the locked door of the market, languid mannequins in the Champs Elysées disporting bright sweaters and scarves, a scuttle of thin leaves blowing along the walks.

Allen plucked aimlessly at one ear. The street looked bereft without its quick throngs of girls, trudging and crowding, laden with the great parcels of food they seemed forever to be carrying back to the College half a mile off. He liked to watch the girls from a distance, on the campus especially, dotting the slopes with fresh clusters of color, as he might watch a congregation of rare graceful birds or animated flowers, behind a sheet of glass.

But sometimes as he came to the office of one of the professors, he would find a student waiting in the chair beside the desk, reading hard, large glasses on her nose, her legs twisted about the rungs. She would look up startled at his knock; and the strong, inquisitive challenge of her eyes always made him quail, acutely conscious that he was meager of build, with narrow flattened temples, a sharp peaked chin and spindly wrists. He would set his card ostentatiously on the desk: Allen Chapter, Textbook Department, Division of Literature, Thompkins & Simms, Incorporated, New York, often adding the scribble: "Better luck later" or "Sorry—I'll be back." Had she any idea . . . ? The wide unflinching eyes gazed up, as she told him with a cool polite cadence when she thought the professor might return. Odd, what childish voices many of these college girls had, for all their casual poise. He did not feel comparably nettled in his encounters at other institutions with young men; nor with the women professors, in whom Crestwick College abounded. The women professors were monumental to him.

Pale leaves scattered from the trees, twirling idly in the air. Allen followed one leaf through its course until it settled in the grass. Already little heaps had gathered along the low hedge bordering the lawn, which served, without a break, both the Lodge and the discreet mansion next door. Allen gave a wry sniff. Some coarse sardonic joker had arranged that hostel and mortuary parlor conjoined.

Letting the curtain drop, he turned to face the room. Lumpy bed covered with stale chintz, lumpy Morris chair lacking a slat, battered bureau, battered table, rickety lamp with a dark red shade; in the washbowl a stain of baleful greenish blue straggling toward the vent. Yet the Lodge in its exterior displayed admirable lines, a noble columned porch. He was not surprised; no fact about any public accommodation could surprise him now. Running down, he thought, running down fast. For a moment he stood as though striving to listen, eyes narrowed, forehead taut; then he moved briskly toward his bags.

He took pleasure in his briefcase. He liked the decisive easy snap as the jaws wedged open, the deep compartments, the hale aroma of leather that bespoke officialdom. He drew out a neat bundle of pamphlets, which he ranked in order on the tabletop. His Crestwick College material, he saw with a frown, applied to the previous academic year; and opening his handsome leather notebook he carefully wrote: "October 10, 9 A.M. (1) Stop at Information Desk. Get current catalogues." Frowning still, he considered, picked up the College directory, flipped it open and studied a list, tapping his fountain pen against his teeth. Then he rewrote the entry on a fresh page: "October 10, 9 A.M. (1) Stop at Information Desk—*Miss Flatbush*. Get current catalogues," and closed the notebook, pleased.

Not even three-thirty yet. He pressed his wristwatch to his ear: the busy little heartbeat was regular, strangely solemn and loud. He cast a swift glance about the room, hooked forward the sordid chair, extracted from the briefcase a paperbound book and gazed at the title page: *Florence Nightingale*, by Cecil Woodham-Smith. She had been an administrator and a pioneer, rather terrifying; besides, the type was painfully small.

Groping, he reached for the Crestwick College catalogue. He liked the clear blue of the cover, with its broad band of white; an excellent printing job, lucid and dignified throughout. He turned to the English Department, and a faint smile touched his thin lips. How stately her name looked heading the faculty, the very first of the group: Ada Armitage Darrow, Ph.D., Litt.D. (Hon.). And she was stately too: tall, firm-shouldered, with a confident strong walk, a crest of silvery pure white hair and dark eyebrows like sudden brushstrokes above the deep dark eyes. She was always very kind; more than kind—friendly, in a true sense. She remembered his name from year to year. "Good morning, Mr. Chapter!" in the ample resonant voice. She was honest. If she was pressed for time she told him so, and arranged a later appointment "not to hurry us." No covert anxious glancing at the clock or slapping together of papers and books with the desperate smile that told him plainly to go. Once she had made a joke of his name when he had fallen into unintentional rhyme as he spoke: "Yes, Mr. Chapter and Verse," quick as a fish; quicker than he of course—he had been visibly baffled until she explained. She had actually turned his own name to a clever joke.

Then, that other occasion, just last year, October, which had almost amounted to an argument. Arguing with Miss Darrow! Yet she had thanked him at the end; though what it was she had thanked him for, exactly, he still was not sure. Some new idea of that queer story they had discussed? But what could he tell a college teacher, with all her degrees?

Miss Darrow had asked him to call again at her office, later in the afternoon when her duties should be discharged. It had meant lingering about the campus for an additional hour; but what was that to him? He was entitled to stroll along these paths, cutting through pines or grassy fields, while the girls in their bright numbers hurried by; he was entitled to watch the little fountain outside the new library annex toss its fleet windy spirals aloft. He had an appointment with Miss Darrow at four.

She started at his knock, while he stood modestly in the doorway, with a swift glance at her engagement pad. Her face was pale and drawn, a trace of irritation about the mouth. "Committees, committees!" she said. "I put it to you, Mr. Chapter, why cannot a teacher simply *teach?*"

Her office was high up in a gable of Deacon Hall fronting the lake. Through the pointed Gothic windows a span of glittering dark blue water appeared rimmed at the edge by a phalanx of trees, like a garden thick with autumn flowers. Persian rugs on the floor, maps and literary pictures on the walls, lamps, cushions, mementos, a tea set and a copper kettle on a tray. One worked up to these graces, Allen supposed. The offices of the underlings were spartan enough.

Miss Darrow leaned back in her chair, forming a pitched roof with her long fingertips. "Now, Mr. Chapter. How very good of you to wait."

Allen snapped the lock of his briefcase open and shut, open and shut, until he noticed that she was following the sound with a controlled wince, as though she had bitten into some acrid fruit. The expectant pause prolonged itself. "Well, I've read that story," he finally said with earnest pride.

"Oh?"

"That story you mentioned last time, the one that's always turning up in all the anthologies everywhere. You asked me if I'd ever read it, and I hadn't, then."

"Yes." She picked up what seemed to be a miniature glass nun and balanced it in one hand. "And did you like it?"

Allen was prepared. "Well, that was down in Mississippi, in the rural area, and he sold shoes. I never mind the heat myself; but of course I can't say about the South. Then, he was lost and sick."

Miss Darrow's eyes flashed alert. "Oh, 'Death of a Traveling Salesman'!" she exclaimed. She ran one finger down the length of the nun's robes and set the figure back on the desk. "Go on, please, Mr. Chapter. I find this terribly interesting."

Allen was less fluent now that he was urged; but Miss Darrow kept her gaze upon him, nodding encouragement. His forehead gathered; he clamped his teeth into his underlip.

"Did you find R. J. Bowman sympathetic as a character?" Miss Darrow asked.

"Well . . . not very." He felt a quick pang of failure as a shade of disapproval crossed her face. "As I said, the circumstances were different. I've never had much contact with country people myself. And covering the New England and mid-Atlantic territory for the last ten years, I know every inch of the ground. I couldn't get lost if I tried. Not that he tried, of course."

"But surely," Miss Darrow said, her tone persuasive, "surely; aren't you fastening on the subordinate points?"

Allen slid his briefcase to the floor and placed his hands on his knees, nervously distressed. It made him proud to be talking with Miss Darrow about a story they had both read; solemn, exalted, significant. At the same time, he knew with heavy gloom that his chance was being marred. He had not measured up. They did not read the story in the same way. He gave a morbid smile. "Well, about the fall lists," he began.

"No, wait, Mr. Chapter." Miss Darrow frowned, meditating some private mystery. How elegant and remote she looked, like a statue carved in melancholy thought. "The naked essential human need, the craving for warmth and love, the ultimate loneliness—didn't you sense something of that? *Only connect, only connect!*" she cried suddenly in a passionate voice, so that Allen jumped.

"Well, I didn't get much from the plot, I must admit," he muttered. "It didn't seem to wind up into anything." He longed now to turn to the autumn book lists, to end this meeting, to get in his car and drive away. He had read that story, and more than once; it seemed vague. What capacity did he lack? A knot of hard resentment gathered in his chest. After all, she was the teacher. If he was too uneducated to connect, it was her job to explain.

The sun had dipped beyond the edge of the gable by now; a somber, dispossessing light invaded the room; outside, a wandering spray of ivy tapped. Miss Darrow sat erect behind the glimmering desk, cradling the little glass nun in her palm. To Allen the rugs, the books, the ornaments, seemed to breathe a hostile message of dismissal. He felt powdery and unreal, like scattered chalk.

Unexpectedly Miss Darrow switched on a lamp; an arc of muted radiance sprang into bloom, softening the chiseled face; her dark eyes glowed, personal and bright.

"But then, how do *you* find it?" she asked. "What is it like?" She paused, as though testing the direction of her words. "I *am* interested, Mr. Chapter; believe me, truly I am. Tell me—what is it like? I mean a . . . traveling appointment like yours?"

To his utter surprise Allen laughed. Sitting within the wash of dimness he felt suddenly safe; tolerant and magnanimous. For her own reasons Miss Darrow wanted to know what his job involved. Oh, he knew! He could tell her all right! It was almost as though he were in the position of teacher now.

"Well, you're on the move of course," he began; "here today and gone tomorrow, as they say. And after a while you get to know what you're up against in each place." He fell into extended thought. "At first for a long time I thought I'd give it up; just clear out. Then after a while it seemed too late. Well. It's the same old rat race everywhere I guess."

"But surely—*different rats*!" Miss Darrow cried. Allen plucked at his ear lobe; the expression sounded shocking on her lips. "But tell me, don't you keep some kind of quarters of your own?" she asked next. "Some cranny with your own belongings to return to after your trips? It's not *things*, owning *things*. It's a matter of one's anchorage in life."

"No. I did. But it got to cost too much. I string along with hotels."

Suddenly Allen felt a tightening pressure within his brain. He wanted urgently to make Miss Darrow understand, as she sat watching with her kind alert eyes, what the taste of his existence really was. She was listening; she was listening to him; no other person in the world but him. The sense of his own schedule rushed upon him in a flood. The morning preparations in a stained bathroom, the pert or sluggish waitress, the ambiguous breakfast coffee gulped, the last hurried packing in the bedroom, this and that tossed out, discarding, forever discarding, since he had to travel light; the highway dizzily unwinding, great vans and double trucks crowding him against the curb, the hum that always started up in his head after the first few miles; pallid sandwiches at a road stop, the jukebox flaring, people huddled thick upon the stools breathing into their lunches hip to hip; the total self-eradication as he approached the college gates, the courteous smile affixed, the guileful arguments about the textbooks he had never read and could not be expected to read; and at the end, the hired room again.

"It does sound rather bleak," Miss Darrow observed, "always in hotels. It must take a quality of courage, of a sort I lack I'm afraid."

"What really gets me," Allen told her loudly, "is this business of always having to sign my name." That was it; this was the kernel of what he was impelled to state. "Sign up in the register every night." He gave a smothered gulp. "Always having to write down my name. It's like a label I have to produce before I *am* anyone. Not me; the name I write down—that's all that counts. In a way it cancels me out. If you know what I mean."

Miss Darrow seemed to rise taller behind the desk, her whole face suffused with light. She flung one arm aloft—for a weird moment Allen thought she was about to shake his hand. "Good!" she said in a ringing congratulatory voice. "You do understand that story. You understand it profoundly; better than perhaps you realize." She smiled a warm embracing smile. "And you've taught me something further too. Thank you, Mr. Chapter. One always wants to learn."

Allen felt giddy, volatile, sheepishly gratified. Miss Darrow was pleased, excited even, by what he had said. He hitched his briefcase forward with his foot, suppressing a little tremor of relief. The examination remained obscure; but he had passed.

Bong—bong—bong—bong the bells in the church steeple clanged. Allen gave his head a quick shake. It was early still, at least two hours before he would be justified in searching out a place in which to eat; not at the Lodge—his room offered a sufficient example of what he wanted to avoid. He looked at the limp cotton cover roughly bundled over blanket and pillows on the bed, and rose to adjust it to more careful lines, puckering his lips. At the window again, he gazed at the slanting lawn, fringed at the verge with a scallop of leaves, like ruffled wavelets in the clear suspended light.

The room was dim as he turned back. On the floor the blue Crestwick catalogue lay where it had slipped beside the chair. He set it on the table, just preceding the directory where it belonged. Suddenly a keen intention flashed across his face. He would go out; and, to give some purpose to his walk, he would find the house where Miss Ada Darrow lived, only to take a look at it as he strolled by. He seized the directory and the village map. Juniper Lane—right, left, straight ahead, right, and on to the little curving street at the end.

In the fresh tart autumn air he felt animated, alert. Leaves tumbled briskly; children cavorted at play, eager voices shrilling loud; big dogs bounced about. Allen walked steadily with circumspect eyes; he mistrusted dogs. No dogs, no children, or anyone, as he neared Juniper Lane. He slackened his pace.

So that was the house!—ample, stately, painted white, wide gracious windows, a great clump of birches at one corner of the lawn, dark evergreens flanking the edge, a tranquil door, a rosy walk. It looked as though it could prevail for centuries.

He stood bemused, pondering the enigma of Miss Darrow's kind; these able, authoritative single women who lived in solid houses and could afford their maintenance. It was the heritage of men to build, to marry, to shape a home whatever it might be; by accident or default he himself had not. But these amazing creatures crossed the border lines of natural fate. They won their own distinction; they paid their own bills; they commanded; they controlled. To Allen they seemed of a superior, exalted race, untroubled by hesitations, reversals or doubt.

He sprang back as the front door of the house swung open. A broad trundling woman emerged and advanced a little distance down the walk. "Hey! You there!" she called.

Allen cast a look behind him to see if any other person were in sight, fearful that Miss Darrow might have caught him spying on her property.

"You! Hey there!" the woman called. She beckoned, smiling, fresh and amiable in her neat blue cotton dress.

Allen cautiously drew closer. "Me?" he asked. "You mean me? Did Miss Darrow . . .?"

The woman continued to smile, with a shine of white pronounced teeth. "Miss Geraldine," she answered. She gave his arm a sturdy nudge. "Just this way, please."

Reprobate, criminal, victim, Allen blundered through the door.

He had never entered so beautiful a room; like Miss Darrow's office magnified. Nothing was new; every object glimmered with familiar use. He had loitered through museums on occasional damp Sundays, and he recognized these furnishings as good—tall highboys with brass handles, inlaid cabinets, tapestry sofas ending in a fluted curl, and everywhere books books books; all steeped in a tenuous fragrance of drying leaves and lavender wax. Awaiting him in a large chair sat a massive woman whose appearance made him blink. Above the unassorted billows of her dress a pale oval face was poised, like a pale enameled egg, topped by short pale hair falling lankly to each side; narrow probing amber eyes; a patriarchal nose; a long thin mouth. One of her legs, embedded in a heavy plaster cast, was propped before her on a stool. Allen turned to his guide with a wild supplicating stare; but she merely beamed, benevolent and vague, and left the room.

"Well, young man," Miss Geraldine announced. "I was expecting you."

"Not me," Allen declared.

"Oh, yes. I felt in my bones that I should have an unknown visitor today. And here you are." She gave a queer booming laugh. "Do sit down—here, where I won't have to strain. Are you one of Ada Darrow's host of witnesses, perchance?"

Haltingly, with a wealth of circumstantial detail, Allen explained his presence before the house, while Miss Geraldine ransacked him with sardonic eyes. "So, if Miss Darrow's home . . ." he ended. "After all, now that I'm here . . ."

Miss Geraldine allotted him the full measure of her gaze. "No," she answered irritably. "Miss Darrow is not at home. In the conventional sense. She died last June."

Allen made a clutching motion with both hands; a cold tremor of denial zigzagged through his head. He stared blindly at the big white plaster cast thrust before him on the stool. It had patches of pencil writing on it, he saw. "But—she can't be!" he cried. "Her name's still in the catalogue."

"Whether or not her name is still in the catalogue I cannot say," Miss Geraldine returned. "Though knowing

Nettie Flatbush I should doubt it very much. Anyway, the new catalogue isn't ready yet. There's been a printing strike. But that's neither here nor there. Ada Darrow died last June. Who are you to contradict my knowledge and my loss?"

"It just—I wasn't prepared," Allen mumbled. "I was looking forward to seeing her again." His nostrils twitched; it piqued his self-respect to realize he had forgotten about the expiration of that catalogue.

"You weren't prepared. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. A host of witnesses, and every single one of them pinching off a little piece of Ada Darrow to consume."

She sank into brooding, like a great old hooded hawk fluffing out its feathers as it breathed. Allen sat mesmerized; he could not think how he should ever be able to rise to his feet and go. In desperate vacuity he bent forward to study the inscriptions on Miss Geraldine's plaster cast: some kind of reckoning in figures; in bold large capitals "DR., 11:30," "F. ALLSOP, 4:00—ASK ABOUT M.," "FRI., RETURN LIBRARY BOOKS." Even the chair on which he sat seemed to waver and sway, as though it might rise up in flight, or simply disappear, according to the grotesque arrangements in this room.

"I see you are examining my Dead Sea Scrolls," Miss Geraldine said, booming out her strange loud laugh, "Oh, yes. Though the mortal instrument may break, one preserves the external forms. Pattern; schedule; that's what we all require. The great thing is, not to *let go*. Or don't you agree?" she concluded, abruptly ceremonious. "And so you were moved to find Ada Darrow's house, just to look at it from outside. Touching. That was always one of Ada's effects."

Allen's cheekbones reddened. Although Miss Geraldine's voice was suave, he felt derided and made small. Miss Geraldine was chipping away at something he knew he wanted to keep.

"She was nice to me, over at the College," he answered sullenly. "We had a real talk once, last October." He gave a thin triumphant grin—here was his vital proof. "She asked me questions about myself, about how I lived and the hotels. In the whole of the ten years I've been traveling the road nobody else anywhere has ever done that before. She took an interest. It was in her office, last October. She asked me about myself."

"Ah," Miss Geraldine cried, striking one hand against her hip, "Ada Darrow was a great liberal humane personality. She had instinct; she had imagination; she had class." The amber eyes decreased to crafty slits. "I can well believe she took an interest in you. That was her downfall and her destruction. She took an interest in everyone, even the lowliest reptile crawling the earth."

Allen squirmed with annoyance. He did not like Miss Geraldine's rhetoric. She spoke as though she were addressing an auditorium, or indulging in a solitary monologue; and why was she impelled to ridicule his meager little claim on Miss Darrow's life, to pry him loose and drive him off. His head had begun to ache; he was parched with thirst. He cast a secret glance at Miss Geraldine's face. She sat upright, majestic among her billows; and he was stunned to see a rim of teardrops glittering along her lower lids. Appalled, he wriggled to his feet.

"Listen!" Miss Geraldine said. "Sit down!" She snatched a pencil from the table at her side and scrawled a furious notation on the plaster cast. Allen made no attempt to read the words. He sank into his chair. When Miss Geraldine spoke again her voice was harsh and stiff.

"Ada Darrow belonged to me. She was mine. I plucked her out of a nest of thistles in her youth, when she was still a student at this venerable place. I saw to her further education. I took her into my house. Oh, yes; this is my house. Look around!" Allen dutifully rolled his eyes to right and left. "Whose seal and imprint mark this room? Mine.

"We shared this house for thirty years. She was malleable, at the start. I had been her teacher, and that is a relationship very hard to transform; though the difference in our ages is not great—eleven years to be exact. I shaped her, I made her, until she stood alone in her accomplishment, as was justified and right.

"She was first and foremost in my life. Oh, don't misunderstand me! What do you know of the affections of a woman's heart? What can any man know? Who has written the chronicles of literature? Men—or women in the paltry similitude of men. Who painted the le-oun, tell me who? I defy any man to comprehend what the honorable friendship between two women can be.

"Her gifts of warmth and loving-kindness were great.

The students adored her. She was chairman of the Department for two successive terms, without dissension or attack; and if that is not a miracle I'd like to know what you suppose a miracle may be. But she used herself up, she was prodigal, she gave herself away to the least of the emotional beggars who came knocking at the door. Always that nibbling, gnawing host demanding Ada's time, Ada's attention, Ada's sympathy—students, colleagues, the very janitors at Deacon Hall think of it. Depriving me of what was mine! Wedging in between! I could not prevent her, by any argument or advice. It was her destruction in the end."

"Oh," Allen said, as Miss Geraldine peered at him hard. Her narrow eyes were ablaze with a furious vindictive light that made the substance of his bones recoil. He shifted his feet and groped toward the floor for the briefcase that was not there. "Well . . ."

"I did not, in my heart, ever for one moment doubt Ada's loyalty," Miss Geraldine continued, ramming him back in his seat by the naked power of her glance. "No! Ada never failed. She lost perspective, however; she deluded herself. She actually believed that she could salvage that bundle of warped distorted misbegotten caprices that constituted Enid Blake. Oh yes; Ada *took an interest* in Enid from the time she was a student at the College a dozen years ago. They kept in touch—which meant that Enid bombarded Ada with intolerable demands whenever she hit rock bottom again. Losing jobs; getting divorces; running away from her obligations, as if that ever helped. Forever lacerated by the world, forever gashed!—and dragging her wounded carcass through an avalanche of complaints for Ada Darrow to restore. It tried my patience if you want to know.

"She was an ugly spectacle with her wobbly nose and long black hair, tall and flat, and absolutely impervious to any hints. She drank intoxicants; she disrupted meals; she left a trail of her belongings everywhere. Cigarette ash on the carpets; sticky glasses damaging my things; handkerchiefs and gloves and even stockings where you'd never dream they could turn up. And that insufferable habit of making free with our Christian names—Ada this! and Geraldine that!—that's what I could not abide. Oh yes, Ada had established her in this house by then—'temporarily, you do understand, don't you?'—after what

Enid called her nervous breakdown last March; as though anything already in splinters can be said to break."

She paused, drawing in her lips to a thin hard seam. A look of slow disquietude wavered across her face. In the silence as she sat brooding like a stricken monolith Allen surreptitiously uncrossed his legs; his muscles were beginning to hurt. Perhaps Miss Geraldine would simply fall asleep? She was old, and certainly she had overtired herself.

"No!" Miss Geraldine exclaimed. "I must be just. It is true I had assented, though with the blackest of doubts. I yielded to Ada's plea, which was soft and ill-considered on my part. In that I am responsible; I hold myself responsible. I do not evade my portion of blame. But 'temporarily' ran to three months, with that selfish slovenly cormorant invading every private aspect of our lives. I could not endure it any more.

"I reminded Ada that this house belonged to me. My house; not hers. I possessed the right to decide and choose. Oh, that was cruel! That was base! We had lived in amity for thirty years, sharing because it gave us happiness to share. Naturally we had our tiffs; but to quarrel in that way, over Enid Blake if you please! Oh, yes; passion ran high—all manner of rancors and resentments came boiling up; betrayals, disappointments, accusations; terrible charges lying in wait, biding their hour to spring. What falls, what sinks—until the volcano blasts! Well. . . . After, we were both shaken and spent; cautious and polite. Ada explained to Enid that she must plan to go. And can you imagine what that vengeful creature did, there in that bedroom just above? Can you imagine what she did? She slashed her own wrists. She did it as a final punishment, to both of us. Ada discovered her in that wild welter of blood. She screamed. Oh, that dreadful scream! I did not know, how could I know, that Ada's heart was suffering strain. She collapsed and died the same day. Gone! Gone forevermore!"

"Now now now!" a voice interrupted. "Not taking your proper rest!" A soft flood of light enveloped the room as the broad cheerful woman appeared. "Getting late," she observed shrewdly.

Miss Geraldine stared at Allen with peevish dislike. "What's he doing here, Myrtle?" she asked. "Did you let him in? Have I even lost control over who is free to occupy this house? And don't carp. I've been resting for hours; though I've had disturbing thoughts I must admit."

Allen staggered to his feet. His angel of deliverance stood waiting, a look of pointed admonition on her face. "Well—good-bye," he called feebly as Myrtle ushered him toward the door. Miss Geraldine merely raised one hand and let it drop, and sank back in her chair, crumpled and ivory pale.

Outside, a wash of lavender and rose streaked the horizon edge, distinct against the clear thin sky. A chill, still waning radiance hovered above the birches at the corner of the lawn; the mounded evergreens huddled dark.

"I shouldn't pay too much attention to Miss Geraldine if I were you," Myrtle said, beaming her affable smile. She cast a wary look behind her, and slanted forward from the hips. "She hasn't been herself since Miss Enid's accident, and poor Miss Ada's passing on. Even before that she was failing so to speak. Were you a friend of Miss Ada's did you say?"

Allen plodded along the pavement hearing his footsteps knock the hard concrete. His scalp throbbed; his limbs were heavy. No dogs or children romped now in the yards; the soft bright radiance banding the horizon was ebbing swiftly to a solemn gray. The houses stood aloof, reserved, one after another springing into cryptic signals of illumination as he passed. A scuffling wind bestirred the fallen leaves.

It was impossible to relate his Ada Darrow to the Ada Darrow of Miss Geraldine's account. Was not he himself a witness of her presence, swinging along the corridors of Deacon Hall, the firm tread measured, the stately profile calm? Or last October, sitting behind her desk under the luminous span of light; not so much a woman as a shaft of sympathetic power. She belonged to the official world of lecture halls and books. Never in a thousand lifetimes could Miss Ada Darrow scream.

He stumbled as the pavement yielded to a stretch of gritty path running beside a thicket of brushwood at his left. Miss Geraldine's voice was powerful and stark: words like sinister harsh leaves rustled still within his brain. Something had caused a terrible crash. What?—creating havoc in its wake. The teardrops edging Miss Geraldine's lids, the bite of pain on her face, the glare of fury shooting from her eyes. Violence, passion, rage, within that solid house? A quiver of cold awe trickled through his limbs; his mind veered fiercely off in flight. Teachers were teachers. They were meant to instruct. They were not meant to grapple and destroy. Miss Geraldine was just bewildered in her wits, as that Myrtle had said; old, excitable, and confused. And hadn't Myrtle plainly spoken of Miss Enid's *accident*?

He stopped, uneasily searching the road ahead. Was this the right corner for Crestwick Lodge? He had almost forgotten to watch. He would have to slip up to his room for his briefcase before setting out in the car; safer not to trust the lock on that rickety door. And another point—that remark Miss Geraldine had made, early in her talk, thrown off like an idle dart; but he had noted its significance. He rapped his fingers against his teeth. Ah!—the printing strike. With a tinge of satisfaction he resumed his pace. But in order to be absolutely certain he must stop at the Information Desk (Miss Flatbush) the next morning to inquire. He was always at a serious disadvantage in his work without the current catalogue.

The House of Asterion

by JORGE LUIS BORGES

I know they accuse me of arrogance, and perhaps of misanthropy, and perhaps of madness. Such accusations (for which I shall extract punishment in due time) are derisory. It is true that I never leave my house, but it is also true that its doors (whose number is infinite) [1] are open day and night to men and to animals as well. Anyone may enter. He will find here no female pomp nor gallant court formality, but he will find quiet and solitude. And he will also find a house like no other on the face of the earth. (There are those who declare there is one similar in Egypt, but they lie.) Even my detractors admit there is not *one single piece of furniture* in the house. Another ridiculous falsehood has it that I, Asterion, am a prisoner. Shall I repeat that there are no locked doors, shall I add that there are no locks? Besides, one afternoon I did step into the street; if I returned before night, I did so because of the fear that the faces of the common people inspired in me, faces as discolored and flat as the palm of one's hand. The sun had already set, but the helpless crying of a child and the rude supplications of the faithful told me I had been recognized. The people prayed, fled, prostrated themselves; some climbed onto the stylobate of the Temple of the Axes, others gathered stones. One of them, I believe, hid himself beneath the sea. Not for nothing was my mother a queen; I cannot be confused with the populace, though my modesty might so desire.

The fact is that I am unique. I am not interested in what one man may transmit to other men; like the philosopher, I think that nothing is communicable by the art of writing. Bothersome and trivial details have no place in my spirit, which is prepared for all that is vast and grand; I have never retained the difference between one letter and another. A certain generous impatience has not permitted that I learn to read. Sometimes I deplore this, for the nights and days are long.

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[1] The original says *fourteen*, but there is ample reason to infer that, as used by Asterion, the numeral stands for *infinite*.

Of course, I am not without distractions. Like the ram about to charge, I run through the stone galleries until I fall dizzy to the floor. I crouch in the shadow of a pool or around a corner and pretend I am being followed. There are roofs from which I let myself fall until I am bloody. At any time I can pretend to be asleep, with my eyes closed and my breathing heavy. (Sometimes I really sleep, sometimes the color of the day has changed when I open my eyes.) But of all the games, I prefer the one about the other Asterion. I pretend that he comes to visit me and that I show him my house. With great obeisance I say to him: *Now we shall return to the first intersection* or *Now we shall come out into another courtyard* or *I knew you would like the drain* or *Now you will see a pool that was filled with sand* or *You will soon see how the cellar branches out.* Sometimes I make a mistake and the two of us laugh heartily.

Not only have I imagined these games, I have also meditated on the house. All the parts of the house are repeated many times, any place is another place. There is no one pool, courtyard, drinking trough, manger; the mangers, drinking troughs, courtyards, pools are fourteen (infinite) in number. The house is the same size as the world; or rather, it is the world. However, by dint of exhausting the courtyards with pools and dusty gray stone galleries I have reached the street and seen the Temple of the Axes and the sea. I did not understand this until a night vision revealed to me that the seas and temples are also fourteen (infinite) in number. Everything is repeated many times, fourteen times, but two things in the world seem to be only once: above, the intricate sun; below, Asterion. Perhaps I have created the stars and the sun and this enormous house, but I no longer remember.

Every nine years nine men enter the house so that I may deliver them from all evil. I hear their steps or their voices in the depths of the stone galleries and I run joyfully to find them. The ceremony lasts a few minutes. They fall one after another without my having to bloody my hands. They remain where they fell and their bodies help distinguish one gallery from another. I do not know who they are, but I know that one of them prophesied, at the moment of his death, that someday my redeemer would come. Since then my loneliness does not pain me, because I know my redeemer lives and he will finally rise from the dust. If my ear could capture all the sounds of the world, I should hear his steps. I hope he will take me to a place with fewer galleries and fewer doors. What will my redeemer be like, I ask myself. Will he be a bull or a man? Will he perhaps be a bull with the face of a man? Or will he be like me?

The morning sun reverberated from the bronze sword. There was no longer even a vestige of blood.

"Would you believe it, Ariadne?" said Theseus. "The Minotaur scarcely defended himself."

(1947) For *Marta Mosquera Eastman*

—*Translated from the Spanish by J.E.I.*

The Frozen Fields

by PAUL BOWLES

The train was late because the hotbox under one of the coaches had caught fire in the middle of a great flat field covered with snow. They had stayed there about an hour. After the noise and rushing of the train, the sudden silence and the embarrassed stirrings of people in their seats induced a general restlessness. At one point another train had shot by on the next track with a roar worse than thunder; in the wake of that, the nervousness of the passengers increased, and they began to talk fretfully in low voices.

Donald had started to scratch pictures with his fingernail in the ice that covered the lower part of the windowpane by his seat. His father had said: "Stop that." He knew better than to ask "Why?" but he thought it; he could not see what harm it would do, and he felt a little resentful toward his mother for not intervening. He could have arranged for her to object to the senseless prohibition, but experience had taught him that she could be counted on to come to his defense only a limited number of times during any given day, and it was imprudent to squander her reserve of good will.

The snow had been cleared from the station platform when they got out. It was bitter cold; a fat plume of steam trailed downward from the locomotive, partially enveloping the first coach. Donald's feet ached with the cold.

"There's Uncle Greg and Uncle Willis!" he cried, and he jumped up and down several times.

"You don't have to shout," said his father. "We see them. And stand still. Pick up your bag."

Uncle Willis wore a black bearskin coat that almost touched the ground. He put his hands under Donald's arms and lifted him up so that his head was at a level with his own, and kissed him hard on the mouth. Then he swung him over into Uncle Greg's arms, and Uncle Greg did the same thing. "How's the man, hey?" cried Uncle Greg, as he set him down.

"Fine," said Donald, conscious of a feeling of triumph, because his father did not like to see boys being kissed. "Men shake hands," he had told him. "They don't kiss."

The sky was crystal clear, and although it was already turning lavender with the passing of afternoon, it still shone with an intense light, like the sky in one scene at the Russian Ballet. His mother had taken him a few weeks earlier because she wanted to see Pavlova; it was not the dancing that had excited him, but the sudden direct contact with the world of magic. This was a magic sky above him now, nothing like the one he was used to seeing above the streets of New York. Everything connected with the farm was imbued with magic. The house was the nucleus of an enchanted world more real than the world that other people knew about. During the long green summers he had spent there with his mother and the members of her family he had discovered that world and explored it, and none of them had ever noticed that he was living in it. But his father's presence here would constitute a grave danger, because it was next to impossible to conceal anything from him, and once aware of the existence of the other world he would spare no pains to destroy it. Donald was not yet sure whether all the entrances were safely guarded or effectively camouflaged.

They sat in the back of the sleigh with a brown buffalo robe tucked around them. The two big gray horses were breathing out steam through their wide nostrils. Silently the white countryside moved past, its frozen trees pink in the late light. Uncle Greg held the reins, and Uncle Willis, sitting beside him, was turned sideways in his seat, talking to Donald's mother.

"My feet hurt," said Donald.

"Well, God Almighty, boy!" cried Uncle Willis. "Haven't you got 'em on the bricks? There are five hot bricks down there. That's what they're there for." He bent over and lifted up part of the heavy lap robe. The bricks were wrapped in newspaper.

"*My* feet are like blocks of ice, too," said Donald's mother. "Here, take your shoes off and put your feet on these." She pushed two of the bricks toward Donald.

"He just wants attention," said Donald's father. But he did not forbid him to have the bricks.

"Is that better?" Uncle Willis asked a moment later.

"It feels good. How many miles is it to the farm?"

"Seven miles to The Corner, and a mile and a half from there."

"Oh, I know it's a mile and a half from The Corner," said Donald. He had walked it many times in the summer, and he knew the names of the farms along the road. "First you come to the Elders, then the Landons, then the Madisons—"

His father pushed him hard in the ribs with his elbow. "Just keep quiet for a while."

Uncle Willis pretended not to have heard this. "Well, well. You certainly have a good memory. How old are you now?"

Donald's throat had constricted; it was a familiar occurrence which did not at all mean that he was going to cry—merely that he felt like crying. He coughed and said in a stifled voice: "Six." Then he coughed again; ashamed, and fearful that Uncle Willis might have noticed something amiss, he added: "But I'll be seven the day after New Year's."

They were all silent after that; there was only the muffled rhythm of the horses' trot and the soft, sliding sound of the runners on the packed snow. The sky was now a little darker than the white meadows, and the woods on the hillside beyond, with their millions of bare branches, began to look frightening. Donald was glad to be sitting in the middle. He knew there were no wolves out there, and yet, could anybody be really certain? There had been wolves at one time—and bears as well—and simply because nobody had seen one in many years, they now said there weren't any. But that was no proof.

They came to The Corner, where the road to the farm turned off from the main road. Seven rusty mailboxes stood there in a crooked row, one for each house on the road.

"R. F. D. Number One," said Uncle Willis facetiously. This had always been a kind of joke among them, ever since they had bought the farm, because they were townspeople and thought the real farmers were very funny.

Now Donald felt he was on home ground, and it gave him the confidence to say: "Rural Free Delivery." He said the words carefully, since the first one sometimes gave him difficulty. But he pronounced it all right, and Uncle Greg, without turning around, shouted: "That's right! You go to school now?"

"Yes." He did not feel like saying more, because he was following the curves in the road, which he knew by heart. But everything looked so different from the way he remembered it that he found it hard to believe it was the same place. The land had lost its intimacy, become bare and unprotected. Even in the oncoming night he could see right through the leafless bushes that should have hidden the empty fields beyond. His feet were all right now, but his hands in their woolen mittens under the buffalo skin were numb with cold.

The farm came into view; in each downstairs window there was a lighted candle and a holly wreath. He bent over and put his shoes on. It was hard because his fingers ached. When he sat up again the sleigh had stopped. The kitchen door had opened; someone was coming out. Everyone was shouting: "Hello!" and "Merry Christmas!" Between the sleigh and the kitchen he was aware only of being kissed and patted, lifted up and set down, and told that he had grown. His grandfather helped him take off his shoes again and removed a lid from the top of the stove so he could warm his hands over the flames. The kitchen smelled, as in summer, of wood smoke, sour milk and kerosene.

It was always very exciting to be in the midst of many people. Each one was an added protection against the constant watchfulness of his mother and father. At home there were only he and they, so that mealtimes were periods of torture. Tonight there were eight at the supper table. They put an enormous old leather-bound dictionary in a chair so he would be high enough, and he sat between his grandmother and Aunt Emilie. She had dark brown eyes and was very pretty. Uncle Greg had married her a year ago, and Donald knew from many overheard conversations that none of the others really liked her.

Gramma was saying: "Louisa and Ivor couldn't get down till tomorrow. Mr. Gordon's driving them down as far as Portersville in his car. They'll all stay in the hotel tonight, and we've got to go in first thing in the morning and bring them out."

"Mr. Gordon, too, I suppose," said his mother.

"Oh, probably," Uncle Greg said. "He won't want to stay alone Christmas Day."

His mother looked annoyed. "It seems sort of unnecessary," she said. "Christmas is a *family* day, after all."

"Well, he's part of the family now," said Uncle Willis with a crooked smile.

His mother replied with great feeling: "I think it's terrible."

"He's pretty bad these days," put in Grampa, shaking his head.

"Still on the old firewater?" asked his father.

Uncle Greg raised his eyebrows. "That and worse. You know. . . . And Ivor too."

Donald knew they were being mysterious because of him. He pretended not to be listening, and busied himself making marks on the tablecloth with his napkin ring.

His father's mouth had fallen open with astonishment. "Where do they get it?" he demanded.

"Prescription," said Uncle Willis lightly. "Some crooked Polack doctor up there."

"Oh, honestly," cried his mother. "I don't see how Louisa *stands* it."

Aunt Emilie, who had been quiet until now, suddenly spoke. "Oh, I don't know," she said speculatively. "They're both very good to her. I think Mr. Gordon's very generous. *He* pays the rent on her apartment, you know, and gives her the use of the car and chauffeur most afternoons."

"You don't know anything about it," said Uncle Greg in a gruff, unpleasant voice which was meant to stop her from talking. But she went on, a bit shrilly, and even Donald could hear that they were in the habit of arguing.

"I *do* happen to know that Ivor's perfectly willing to give her a divorce any time she wants it, because she told me so herself."

There was silence at the table; Donald was certain that if he had not been there they would all have begun to talk at that point. Aunt Emilie had said something he was not supposed to hear.

"Well," said Uncle Willis heartily, "how about another piece of cake, Donald, old man?"

"How about bed, you mean," said his father. "It's time he went to bed."

His mother said nothing, helped him from his chair and took him upstairs.

The little panes of his bedroom window were completely covered with ice. Opening his mouth, he breathed on one pane until a round hole had been melted through and he could see the blackness outside. "Don't do that, dear," said his mother. "Gramma'll have to clean the window. Now come on; into bed with you. There's a nice hot brick under the covers so your feet won't get cold." She tucked the blankets around him, kissed him, and took the lamp from the table. His father's voice, annoyed, came up from the foot of the stairs. "Hey, Laura! What's going on up there? Come on."

"Won't there be any light in my room at all?" Donald asked her.

"I'm coming," she called. She looked down at Donald. "You never have a light at home."

"I know, but home I can turn it on if I need it."

"Well, you're not going to need it tonight. Your father would have a fit if I left the lamp. You know that. Now just go to sleep."

"But I won't be able to sleep," he said miserably.

"Laura!" shouted his father.

"Just a *minute!*" she cried, vexed.

"Please, Mother . . . ?"

Her voice was adamant. "This cold air will put you to sleep in two shakes of a lamb's tail. Now go to sleep." She went to the doorway, the lamp in her hand, and disappeared through it, closing the door behind her.

There was a little china clock on the table that ticked very loud and fast. At infrequent intervals from below came a muffled burst of laughter which immediately subsided. His mother had said: "I'll open this window about an inch; that'll be enough." The room was growing colder by the minute. He pushed the sole of one foot against the brick in the middle of the bed, and heard the crackle of the newspaper that enfolded it. There was nothing left to do but go to sleep. On his way through the borderlands of consciousness he had a fantasy. From the mountain behind the farm, running silently over the icy crust of the snow, leaping over the rocks and bushes, came a wolf. He was running toward the farm. When he got there he would look through the windows until he found the dining room where the grownups were sitting around the big table. Donald shuddered when he saw his eyes in the dark through the glass. And now, calculating every movement perfectly, the wolf sprang, smashing the panes, and seized Donald's father by the throat. In an instant, before anyone could move or cry out, he was gone again with his prey still between his jaws, his head turned sideways as he dragged the limp form swiftly over the surface of the snow.

The light of dawn was in the room when Donald opened his eyes. Already there were bumpings in the bowels of the house: people were stirring. He heard a window slammed shut, and then the regular sound of someone splitting wood with a hatchet. Presently there were nearer noises, and he knew that his parents in the next room had got up. Then his door was flung open and his mother came in, wearing a thick brown flannel bathrobe and with her hair falling loose down her back. "Merry Christmas!" she cried, holding up a gigantic red mesh stocking crammed with fruit and small packages. "Look what I found hanging by the fireplace!" He was disappointed because he had hoped to go and get his stocking himself. "I brought it up to you because the house is as cold as a barn," she told him. "You stay put right here in bed till it's warmed up a little."

"When'll we have the tree?" The important ritual was the tree: the most interesting presents were piled under it.

"You just hold your horses," she told him. "You've got your stocking. We can't have the tree till Aunt Louisa gets here. You wouldn't want her to miss it, would you?"

"Where's my present for Aunt Louisa and Uncle Ivor? Uncle Ivor's coming, too, isn't he?"

"Of course he's coming," she replied, with that faintly different way of speaking she used when she mentioned Uncle Ivor. "I've already put it under the tree with the other things. Now you just stay where you are, all covered up, and look at your stocking. I'm going to get dressed." She shivered and hurried back into her room.

The only person he had to thank at breakfast was his grandfather, for a box of colored pencils which had been jammed into the foot of the stocking. The other gifts had been tagged: "For Donald from Santa." Uncle Willis and

Uncle Greg had eaten an early breakfast and gone in the sleigh to the hotel in Portersville to fetch Aunt Louisa and Uncle Ivor. When they got back, Donald ran to the window and saw that Mr. Gordon had come, too. Everyone had talked so mysteriously about Mr. Gordon that he was very eager to see him. But at that moment his mother called him upstairs to help her make the beds. "We all have to do as much as we can for Gramma," she told him. "Lord knows she's got all she can manage with the kitchen work."

But eventually he heard Aunt Louisa calling up the stairwell. They went down: he was smothered in kisses, and Aunt Louisa asked him: "How's my boy? You're *my* boy, aren't you?" Then Uncle Ivor kissed him, and he shook hands with Mr. Gordon, who was already sitting in Grampa's armchair, where nobody else ever sat. He was plump and pale, and he wore two big diamond rings on one hand and an even bigger sapphire on the other. As he breathed he wheezed slightly; now and then he pulled an enormous yellow silk handkerchief out of his breast pocket and wiped his forehead with it. Donald sat down on the other side of the room and turned the pages of a magazine, from time to time looking up to observe him. He had called Donald "my lad," which sounded very strange, like someone talking in a book. At one point he noticed Donald's attention, and beckoned to him. Donald went and stood beside the armchair while Mr. Gordon reached into his pocket and pulled out a fat watch with a little button near the stem. "Push it," he said. Donald pushed the button, and tiny chimes struck inside the watch. A few minutes later Mr. Gordon signaled to him afresh; Donald bounded over and pressed the button again. The next time, his mother told him to stop bothering Mr. Gordon.

"But he *asked* me to," objected Donald.

"Sit down right there. We're all going in and have our tree in a little while. Uncle Ivor's going to be Santa Claus."

Presently Uncle Willis came into the room. "Well, everybody," he said, rubbing his hands together, "I think the parlor's warm enough now. How about our tree?"

"It's about time," said Aunt Emilie. She was wearing a red taffeta dress which Donald had heard his mother discussing with his father earlier. *"Most* inappropriate," she had said. "The girl doesn't seem to realize she's living on a farm." Aunt Emilie reached down and took Donald's hand. "Would you care to accompany me, sir?" she said. They walked into the parlor holding hands. The fire in the fireplace roared and crackled.

"Where's Ivor?" said Uncle Greg. "Has everybody got a seat?"

"Here he is," said Uncle Ivor, coming in from the hallway. He had put on an old red knitted skullcap and a red dressing gown, and he had a wreath of green fluted paper around his neck. "This is all Santa Claus could find," he announced.

Aunt Louisa began to laugh. "Look at your Uncle Ivor," she told Donald. "I am," said Donald. But he was really looking at the tree. It was a tall hemlock that reached to the ceiling, and underneath it was piled the most enormous assortment of packages he had ever seen. "Look at that!" they all cried.

"What *do* you suppose is in them all?" said Aunt Louisa.

"I don't know," he replied.

Uncle Ivor sat down on the floor as near the tree as he could get, and lifting up a large crate he passed it to Uncle Greg, who stood in the middle of the room. "Let's get this out of the way first," he said. Then Uncle Greg intoned: "To Donald from the folks at Rutland."

While Uncle Ivor went on passing out packages, Donald struggled with his box. He was vaguely aware of the little cries that were being uttered around him: "How lovely! But it's too much!" "Oh, you shouldn't have!" "Why did you do it?" as the others opened their gifts, but he was too preoccupied to notice that most of the exclamations were being addressed to Mr. Gordon, who sat in the window looking very pleased.

It was too good to believe: a fire engine three feet long, with rubber tires and a bell and a siren and three ladders that shot upward automatically when it stopped. Donald looked at it, and for a moment was almost frightened by the power he knew it had to change his world.

"Oh . . . isn't . . . that . . . lovely!" said his mother, her annoyance giving a sharp edge to each word. "Louisa, why did you do it?" Donald glanced up quickly and saw Aunt Louisa indicate Mr. Gordon with a jerk of her head, as if she were saying: "Everything is his fault."

His mother moved along the floor toward the crate and fished out the greeting card. "I want you to keep each card in with the present it came with," she told Donald, "because you'll have a lot of thank-you notes to write tomorrow, and you don't want to get them mixed up. But you can thank Aunt Louisa and Uncle Ivor right now."

He hated to be told to thank a person in that person's presence, as though he were a baby. But he said the words bravely, facing Mr. Gordon: "Thank you so much for the beautiful fire engine."

"There's more there, my lad," beamed Mr. Gordon; the diamonds flashed in the sunlight.

Aunt Emilie was holding out her arm in front of her, looking at her new wrist watch. Grampa had put on a black silk dressing gown and was smoking a cigar. He looked perfectly content as he turned to Mr. Gordon and said: "Well, you've spoiled us all." But Donald's mother interpreted his phrase as a reproach, and added in explanation: "We're not used to getting such *elaborate* gifts, Mr. Gordon."

Mr. Gordon laughed, and turning to Donald, told him: "You've barely started, my lad. Tell your Uncle Ivor to get on with it."

Now it seemed as though nearly every package was for Donald. He opened them as fast as he could, and was freshly bewildered by the apparition of each new marvel. There were, of course, the handkerchiefs and books and mufflers from the family, but there was also a Swiss music box with little metal records that could be changed; there were roller skates, a large set of lead soldiers, a real accordion, and a toy village with a streetcar system that ran on a battery. As Donald opened each package, the little cries of admiration made by his parents came closer to sounding like groans. Finally his father said, in a voice loud enough for Mr. Gordon to hear him above the general conversation: "It's bad business for one kid to get so much."

Mr. Gordon had heard him. "You were young once yourself," he said airily.

Aunt Emilie was trying on a fur jacket that Uncle Greg had given her. Her face was flushed with excitement; she had just planted a big kiss on Uncle Greg's cheek.

"The little Astor baby got five thousand dollars' worth of toys on its last birthday," she said to Donald's father, running her hand back and forth along the fur.

Donald's father looked at her with narrowed eyes. "That," he said, enunciating very clearly, "is what might be called an *asinine* remark."

Save for the crackling of the fire there was silence for a moment in the room. Those who had not heard knew something had happened. Uncle Greg looked quickly at Donald's father, and then at Aunt Emilie. Maybe there would be a quarrel, thought Donald, with everyone against his father. The idea delighted him; at the same time he felt guilty, as though it were his doing.

Uncle Ivor was handing him a package. Automatically he untied the ribbon, and pulled out a tan cashmere sweater. "That's Mother's and Daddy's present to you," his mother said quietly. "It's a little big for you now, but I got it big purposely so you could grow into it." The small crisis had passed; they all began to talk again. Donald was relieved and disappointed. "How about christening that bottle of brandy?" cried Uncle Willis.

"You menfolk sit here," Gramma told them. "We've got to get out into the kitchen."

"I'll bring yours out to you," said Uncle Ivor to Aunt Louisa as she got up.

On her way out of the room Donald's mother bent over and touched his shoulder. "I want you to put every present back into its box just the way it was. After that you carry them all up into our room and stack them carefully in the corner under the window. You hear me?"

She went out. Donald sat a moment; then he jumped up and ran after her to ask if he might save out just one thing—the fire engine, perhaps. She was saying to Gramma: ". . . quite uncalled-for. Besides, I don't know how we're *ever* going to get it all back to New York. Owen can take the big things at least with him tomorrow, I suppose."

He stopped running, and felt peace descend upon him. His father was leaving the farm. Then let him take everything with him, fire engine and all; it would not matter. He turned and went back into the parlor, where he meticulously packed the toys into their boxes, put the covers on, and tied them up with lengths of ribbon and string.

"What's all this?" exclaimed Mr. Gordon suddenly, noticing him. "What are you doing?"

"I have to take everything upstairs," said Donald.

His father joined the conversation. "I don't want to find those boxes lying all over the place up there, either. See that you pile 'em neatly. Understand?"

Donald continued to work without looking up.

After a moment Mr. Gordon said under his breath: "Well, I'll be damned." Then to Donald's father: "I've seen some well-behaved kids in my time, but I don't mind telling you I never saw one like *that*. Never."

"Discipline begins in the cradle," said his father shortly.

"It's sinister," murmured Mr. Gordon to himself.

Donald glanced up and saw his father looking at Mr. Gordon with hatred.

In the kitchen his grandmother, his aunts and his mother were busy preparing dinner. Donald sat by the window mashing potatoes. The blue of the sky had disappeared behind one great curtain of cloud, uniformly white. "We'll have more snow before night," said Gramma, looking out the window above the sink.

"Want to smell something good?" Donald's mother asked him. He ran across to the stove and she opened the oven door: the aroma of onions mingled with that of the roasting turkey. "He's coming along beautifully," she announced. She shut the oven door with a bang and hung the potholders on their hooks. Then she went into the pantry. Donald followed her. It was very cold in here, and it smelled of pickles and spices. His mother was searching for something along the shelves, among the jars and tin boxes.

"Mother," he said.

"Hmm?" she replied distraughtly, without looking at him.

"Why does Mr. Gordon live at Uncle Ivor's?"

Now she did look at him, and with an intensity that startled him. "What was that?" she demanded sharply. Then, before he could repeat his question, she went on in a suddenly matter-of-fact voice: "Dear, don't you know that Uncle Ivor's what they call a male nurse? Like Miss Oliver, you remember, who took care of you when you had influenza? Only a man. A man nurse."

"Is Mr. Gordon sick?"

"Yes, he is," she said, lowering her voice to little more than a whisper, "He's a very sick man, but we don't talk about it."

"What's he got?" He was conscious of being purposely childish at the moment, in the hope of learning more. But his mother was already saying: "I don't know, dear. You go back into the kitchen now. It's too cold for you in here. Scoot! Out with you!" He giggled, ran back into the kitchen, satisfied at having definitely established the existence of a mystery.

During dinner his father looked across at him and, with the particular kind of sternness he reserved for remarks which he knew were unwelcome, said: "You haven't been outside yet today, young man. We'll take a walk down the road later."

Aunt Louisa had brought a large glass of brandy to the table with her and was sipping it along with her food. "It's too cold, Owen," she objected. "He'll catch his death of cold." Donald knew she was trying to help him, but he wished she had kept quiet. If it became an issue, his father would certainly not forget about the walk.

"Too cold!" scoffed his father. "We have a few basic rules in *our* little family, and one of them is that he has to get some fresh air every day."

"Couldn't you make an exception for Christmas? Just for one day?" demanded Aunt Louisa.

Donald did not dare look up, for fear of seeing the expression on his father's face.

"Listen, Louisa," he said acidly. "I suggest you just stay on your side of the fence, and I'll stay on mine. We'll get along a lot better." Then as an afterthought he snapped: "That all right with you?"

Aunt Louisa leaned across Grampa's plate toward Donald's father and spoke very loud, so that everyone stopped eating. "No, it's not all right with me!" she cried. "All you do is pick on the child from morning till night. It's shameful! I won't sit by and watch my own flesh and blood plagued that way!"

Both Gramma and Donald's father began to speak at once. Gramma was saying: "Louisa," trying to soothe her. Donald's father shouted: "You've never *had* a kid. You don't know the first thing *about* raising kids."

"I know when a man's selfish and plain cussed," Aunt Louisa declared.

"Louisa!" cried Gramma in a tone of surprise and mild reproof. Donald continued to look at his plate.

"Have I ever come up to Rutland and stuck my nose in your affairs and criticized? Have I?" demanded Donald's father.

"Now come on," said Uncle Willis quickly. "Let's not spoil a beautiful Christmas."

"That's right," Grampa said. "We're all happy. Let's not say anything we'll be sorry for later."

But Aunt Louisa would not retreat. She took a fast gulp of brandy and almost choked on it. Then, still leaning toward Donald's father, she went on. "What do you mean, come to Rutland and criticize? What've you got to criticize in Rutland? Something wrong there?"

For an instant Donald's father did not reply. During that instant it was as though everyone felt the need to say something without being able to say it. The one who broke the short silence was Donald's father, using a peculiar, soft voice which Donald recognized immediately as a vicious imitation of Uncle Ivor. "Oh, *no*! There's nothing wrong in *Rut*land!"

Suddenly, with two simultaneous motions, Donald's mother slapped her napkin into her plate and pushed her chair back violently. She rose and ran out of the room, slamming the door. No one said anything. Donald sat frozen, unable to look up, unable even to breathe. Then he realized that his father had got up, too, and was on his way out.

"Leave her alone, Owen," said Gramma.

"You keep out of this," his father said. His footsteps made the stairs creak as he went up. No one said anything until Gramma made as if to rise. "I'm going up," she declared.

"For God's sake, Abbie, sit still," Grampa told her. Gramma cleared her throat, but did not get up.

Aunt Louisa looked very red, and the muscles of her face were twitching. "Hateful," she said in a choked voice. "Just hateful."

"I felt like slapping his face," confided Aunt Emilie. "Did you hear what he said to me when we were having our presents?"

At a glance from Uncle Greg, Aunt Emilie stopped. "Why, Donald!" she exclaimed brightly. "You've scarcely touched your dinner! Aren't you hungry?"

In his mind's eye he was seeing the bedroom upstairs, where his father was twisting his mother's arm and shaking her to make her look at him. When she wouldn't he punched her, knocking her down, and kicked her as hard as he could, all over her body. He looked up. "Not very," he said.

Without warning Mr. Gordon began to talk, holding his glass in front of him and examining it as he turned it this way and that. "Family quarrels," he sighed. "Same old thing. Reminds me of my boyhood. When I look back on it, it seems to me we never got through a meal without a fight, but I suppose we must have once in a while." He set the glass down. "Well, they're all dead now, thank God."

Donald looked quickly across at Mr. Gordon as if he were seeing him for the first time.

"It's snowing!" cried Gramma triumphantly. "Look, it's snowing again. I knew we'd have more snow before dark." She did not want Mr. Gordon to go on talking.

Aunt Louisa sobbed once, got up, and went out into the kitchen. Uncle Ivor followed her.

"Why, Donald! You've got the wishbone!" cried Aunt Emilie. "Eat the meat off it and we'll hang it up over the stove to dry, and tomorrow we'll wish on it. Wouldn't that be fun?"

He picked it up in his fingers and began to chew on the strips of white meat that clung to it. When he had carefully cleaned it, he got down and went out into the kitchen with it.

The room was very quiet; the teakettle simmered on the stove. Outside the window, the falling snowflakes looked dark against the whiteness beyond. Aunt Louisa was sitting on the high stool, doubled over, with a crumpled handkerchief in her hand, and Uncle Ivor was bending over her talking in a very low voice. Donald laid the wishbone on the sink shelf and started to tiptoe out, but Uncle Ivor saw him. "How'd you like to go up to the henhouse with me, Donald?" he said. "I've got to find us a dozen eggs to take back to Rutland."

"I'll get my coat," Donald told him, eager to go out before his father came back downstairs.

The path up the hill to the henhouse had been made, not by clearing the snow away, but by tramping it down.

The new snow was drifting over the track; in some places it already had covered it. When Uncle Ivor went into the henhouse Donald stood still, bending his head back to catch some snowflakes in his mouth. "Come on in and shut the door. You'll let all the heat out," Uncle Ivor told him.

"I'm coming," said Donald. He stepped through the doorway and closed the door. The smell inside was very strong. As Uncle Ivor approached the hens, they set up a low, distrustful murmur.

"Tell me, Donald," said Uncle Ivor as he explored the straw with his hands. "What?" said Donald.

"Does your mother often run to her room and shut the door, the way she did just now?"

"Sometimes."

"Why? Is your father mean to her?"

"Oh," said Donald vaguely, "they have fights." He felt uncomfortable.

"Yes. Well, it's a great pity your father ever got married. It would have been better for everybody if he'd stayed single."

"But then I wouldn't have been born at all!" cried Donald, uncertain whether Uncle Ivor was serious or not.

"At least, we *hope* not!" said Uncle Ivor, rolling his eyes and looking silly. Now Donald knew it was a kind of joke, and he laughed. The door was flung open. "Donald!" roared his father.

"What is it?" he said, his voice very feeble.

"Come out here!"

He stumbled toward the door; his father was peering inside uncertainly. "What are you doing in there?" he demanded.

"Helping Uncle Ivor look for eggs."

"Hmph!" Donald stepped out and his father shut the door.

They started to walk along the road in the direction of the Smithson farm. Presently his father fell in behind him and prodded him in the back, saying: "Keep your head up. Chest out! D'you want to get round-shouldered? Before you know it you'll have curvature of the spine."

When they had got out of sight of the house, in a place where the tangle of small trees came to the edge of the road on both sides, his father stopped walking.

He looked around, reached down, picked up a handful of the new snow and rolled it into a hard ball. Then he threw it at a fairly large tree, some distance from the road. It broke, leaving a white mark on the dark trunk. "Let's see you hit it," he told Donald.

A wolf could be waiting here, somewhere back in the still gloom of the woods. It was very important not to make him angry. If his father wanted to take a chance and throw snowballs into the woods, he could, but Donald would not. Then perhaps the wolf would understand that he, at least, was his friend.

"Go on," said his father.

"No. I don't want to."

With mock astonishment his father said: "Oh, you don't!" Then his face became dangerous and his voice cracked like a whip. "Are you going to do what I told you?"

"No!" It was the first time he had openly defied him. His father turned very red.

"Listen here, you young whippersnapper!" he cried, his voice tight with anger. "You think you're going to get away with this?" Before Donald knew what was happening, his father had seized him with one hand while he bent over and with the other scooped up as much snow as he could. "We'll settle this little matter right now," he said through his teeth. Suddenly he was rubbing the snow violently over Donald's face, and at the same time that Donald gasped and squirmed, he pushed what was left of it down his neck. As he felt the wet, icy mass sliding down his back, he doubled over. His eyes were squeezed shut; he was certain his father was trying to kill him. With a desperate lunge he bounded free and fell face-downward into the snow.

"Get up," his father said disgustedly. He did not move. If he held his breath long enough he might die.

His father yanked him to his feet. "I've had just about enough of your monkeyshines," he said. Clutching him tightly with both hands, he forced him to hobble ahead of him, back through the twilight to the house.

Donald moved forward, looking at the white road in front of him, his mind empty of thoughts. An unfamiliar feeling had come to him: he was not sorry for himself for being wet and cold, or even resentful at having been mistreated. He felt detached; it was an agreeable, almost voluptuous sensation which he accepted without understanding or questioning it.

As they advanced down the long alley of maple trees in the dusk his father said: "Now you can go and cry in your mother's lap."

"I'm not crying," said Donald loudly, without expression. His father did not answer.

Fortunately the kitchen was empty. He could tell from the sound of the voices in the parlor that Aunt Louisa, Uncle Ivor and Mr. Gordon were getting ready to leave. He ran upstairs to his room and changed his clothes completely. The hole he had breathed in the ice on the windowpane had frozen over thickly again, but the round mark was still visible. As he finished dressing his mother called him. It was completely dark outside. He went downstairs. She was standing in the hallway.

"Oh, you've changed your clothes," she said. "Come out and say good-bye to Aunt Louisa and Uncle Ivor. They're in the kitchen." He looked quickly at her face to see if there were signs of her recent tears; her eyes were slightly bloodshot.

Together they went into the kitchen. "Donald wants to say good-bye to you," she told Mr. Gordon, steering Donald to Aunt Louisa. "You've given him a wonderful Christmas"—her voice became reproachful—"but it was *much* too much."

The thick beaver collar of Mr. Gordon's overcoat was turned up over his ears, and he had on enormous fur gloves. He smiled and clapped his hands together expectantly; it made a cushioned sound. "Oh, it was great fun," he said. "He reminds me a little of myself, you know, when I was his age. I was a sort of shy and quiet lad, too." Donald felt his mother's hand tighten on his shoulder as she pushed him toward Aunt Louisa. "Mm," she said, "Well, Auntie Louisa, here's somebody who wants to say good-bye to you."

Even in the excitement of watching Uncle Willis and Uncle Greg drive the others off in the sleigh, Donald did not miss the fact that his father had not appeared in the kitchen at all. When the sleigh had moved out of sight down the dark road, everyone went into the parlor and Grampa put another log on the fire.

"Where's Owen?" Gramma said in a low voice to Donald's mother.

"He must be upstairs. To tell the truth, I don't care very much where he is."

"Poor child," said Gramma. "Headache a little better?"

"A little." She sighed. "He certainly managed to take all the pleasure out of *my* Christmas."

"A mean shame," said Gramma.

"It was all I could do to look Ivor in the face just now. I mean it."

"I'm sure they all understood," said Gramma soothingly. "Just don't you fret about it. Anyway, Owen'll be gone tomorrow, and you can rest up."

Shortly after Uncle Willis and Uncle Greg got back, Donald's father came downstairs. Supper was eaten in almost complete silence; at no time did his father speak to him or pay him any attention. As soon as the meal was over his mother took him upstairs to bed.

When she had left him, he lay in the dark listening to the sound of the fine snow as the wind drove it against the panes. The wolf was out there in the night, running along paths that no one had ever seen, down the hill and across the meadow, stopping to drink at a deep place in the brook where the ice had not formed. The stiff hairs of his coat had caught the snow; he shook himself and climbed up the bank to where Donald sat waiting for him. Then he lay down beside him, putting his heavy head in Donald's lap. Donald leaned over and buried his face in the shaggy fur of his scruff. After a while they both got up and began to run together, faster and faster, across the fields.

The Pool at Ryusenji

by WILLIAM BUTLER

One day, when Richard Bolas was five years old, he struck a match and put it to a living room curtain and burned his house down. As soon as he saw the flames snap high and sear the walls and ceiling, he ran out of the house, frightened. He ran down the street to a vacant lot and hid in the high grass there and listened as the fire trucks screamed past him to come to a noisy stop a short distance from him, and listened to the sounds of excited people. He heard his mother make some terrible sounds which rose high above the rest of the din and he wondered about them and wept. He remained in the grass until it was dark and the fire trucks had gone away. When he at last left the lot and returned to his house, he found that its ruins were guarded by a man in a dark uniform. A large side of the house loomed grim in the night, all that was left of the house which had stood there for as long as he could remember. The rest lay in a black shambles and a dank acid odor filled the air.

"Where is my mother?" he asked the man in uniform and the man became animated and hurried to a nearby house to make a telephone call.

Soon Richard's father came in a car and he greeted Richard with wonderful warmth, then drove him to an apartment building. There were only three rooms to the apartment and in one of them his mother was sleeping.

"Be quiet," said his father, who had not talked to Richard all the way home. "Your mother needs to sleep now."

And then his father had taken him to a table in a small kitchen and given him warm milk and talked to him very seriously. "Your sister is dead," he told Richard. "The house burned down and your sister was killed. But I'm very glad that you're safe. We were afraid you were hurt too. Where were you?"

"I ran away," Richard said dazedly, staring at the milk without touching the glass.

"Of course you did," his father said with such a deep pitying emotion that Richard couldn't understand it.

It wasn't long after the fire that Richard began to grow moody. It was understandable to his parents that he had developed a dread of fire and kept his distance even from the fireplace in their new home, but the profundity of his long morose silences bewildered them. He stayed to himself and it became impossible to get him to play with other children. His eyes grew sullen and, except for that, rather vapid.

Richard took to collecting butterflies and moths when he was seven and he gave all of his free time to his collection, mastering the art of mounting, and keeping a complete file on all the species he captured and sent away for. When he was ten, to his parents' amazement, it proved that Richard had the largest collection of butterflies and moths in the city. His morose little face appeared in newspapers but his fame was brief, for neither newspapermen nor the butterfly specialist from the university could communicate properly with Richard. For that matter, his interest in butterflies departed as swiftly as it had attacked him, only a few months after he had been interviewed and photographed. One late afternoon Richard took every one of his butterfly boards and his complete card file into the back yard and built a huge bonfire with them and then he ran away from the flames.

"Why *can* you have burnt your butterflies, Richard?" asked his mother in annoyance. "Didn't you want them any more?"

"I suppose so," Richard had replied simply and he added only, "Anyhow, they're gone."

Richard's next interest seemed the product of his insularity. His broad reading took him into certain byways of religion and the subject of religion began to fascinate him. When he was twelve he took to reading St. Augustine and Aquinas, then Lao-tse, Confucius, Mencius, Suzuki, Hindu tomes by endless Krishnaists and numerous socio-archaeological papers. For his birthday, because Richard had seen them in a store and asked for them, his mother bought him the *Zend-Avesta* and a little image of the Indian god, Acala. And one day, on her own, his mother came home with a present entitled

The Book of the Dead, which she suspected Richard would enjoy. He was enormously happy with her gift and smiled, then went to his room to read.

At dinner one night, when he was fourteen, Richard announced, "There is only one god."

"Did you think there were two?" grinned his father.

"You don't understand," Richard said gloomily.

Through quiet laughter his mother said, "Don't speak to your father like that, Richard."

Richard seldom spoke anyhow and he didn't speak to his parents about religion again.

His interest in the formal study of religion waned when he was sixteen and he substituted for it an interest in Asian affairs. Although he still didn't speak to anyone, he grew fond of saying, "The future lies in Asia," when the opportunity arose, and when he graduated from high school his parents sent him to New York to give him a foundation, they said, for his life in Asian studies.

Richard was a solitary student in New York and acquired, in his remoteness, a thorough if bookish knowledge of Asian lore, literature, life, politics and history. He was awarded a fellowship to continue his studies in Tokyo and he packed up his clothes, the biwa upon which he had been practicing and his image of Acala, and left to spend a week at home before leaving the country.

The week at home was not comfortable. His mother, who had seen little of him for four years, appeared worried about his sailing off by himself for an Orient which, she herself having slight knowledge of it, had to be distrusted. She seemed to work to grow close to her son in the few days he spent at home, talking to him about some of the more pleasant moments of his childhood and then trying to talk to him about those things in which he alone was interested.

"Do you still have *The Book of the Dead?"* she asked him and, laughing, she added, "I was nervous about buying a book with a title like that, but I knew you'd like it."

"Yes," he lied to shorten the conversation, "I still have it." He was no longer able to relax in the presence of his parents and found it difficult to keep up a conversation with his mother or father, no matter the subject. As for *The Book of the Dead,* it along with his other books on religion had been incarcerated in a furnace in the basement of the building in which he had lived in New York. He had dusted each of the books carefully and carried them all to the basement and, trembling at having to open the big furnace, given them up to the flames. Then he sped from the dark basement and returned to his room and cried.

Richard left America with his clothes, his biwa and his image of Acala and, on the freighter which took him to Japan, he plucked at the biwa, trying to make the sounds he wrought resemble an ancient Japanese tune he had once heard. During his second week at sea he brought the curious melody out of the instrument and suddenly wanted to force the biwa to remain at just that moment in his history when it had given him pleasure. He stole from his cabin late that night and crept out into a gusty North Pacific wind and dropped the biwa into the water. It was so dark that he didn't see it hit the water and the noisy rush of the ocean kept him from hearing it. It was as though the biwa had been eaten up by the wind.

In Tokyo Richard took up a life similar to that which he had lived in New York, except that he had replaced his biwa with a friend. An American student named Charlotte Adams had refused to take notice of his evident aversion to people and had at last succeeded in getting him to talk to her. He had nothing much to say to her, but that he said anything seemed to please her and he accompanied her on some of her unusually searching tours of Tokyo. In Charlotte, Richard saw a frankness and a zest for doing things which, after a fashion, he envied. In time, he grew to depend upon her occasional company and she at length was able to encourage him to participate in more social activity. She convinced him that he ought to be a member of some of the small tea-drinking parties she held at her rooms and in the end he complied with her wishes, although it was only rarely that he added anything to the random conversations.

At one such gathering Charlotte announced, "I was at Ryusenji today. Have you ever been to Ryusenji?" No one had. "Well, it's at Fudomae and there was a tan young man, quite naked, taking a shower in the pool. I was thoroughly startled."

Richard thought it a more promising remark than any made during the last conversation, but Charlotte's manner during the gatherings was more flippant and superficial than when she was alone with him and he was sure her remark would lead to nothing much better than the pointless words which had preceded it. Three of the four persons present, all foreign students in Tokyo, had been playing a game of judging popular Japanese foods by the In and Out system, an equation in which Zen philosophy was used as the modifier. Soba, udon and tea were In because they could be taken noisily. Sushi was Out because it was pretentious. Sashimi was In, Samuel Burns had suggested, because it was too far Out to stay Out, even if it was a little pretentious. Richard had kept his eyes down throughout the game, the very sound of the chatter nearly painful to his ears.

"He wasn't the least bit disturbed by my watching him," said Charlotte.

"Did you watch him?" asked a red-haired girl named Ceecee Witter. "I shouldn't have been able to do that."

"Well I was able to do it," Charlotte said with no sign of irritation. "For a minute, anyhow. I'm surprised no one has been there. I've been there a number of times. Sam, I thought you knew everything about Tokyo. You've never been to Ryusenji?"

"I've heard about it," Samuel Burns said. "There's a little place there called Lovers Mound dedicated to Gompachi and Komurasaki."

"Yes, a little parkish place," Charlotte said, and concluded, "Anyhow, it's all very nice. And the man who brought sweet potatoes into Kanto is buried there, next to a beautiful seated statue of Fudo. Oh, that's what I meant to tell you. This is the interesting part, Richard," she had a bothersome habit of trying to pull him into the talking. "There was that fellow out there in the bitter cold—"

"My God, it *was* cold today," said Samuel Burns. "Twenty-two or twenty-three."

"And the water would be still colder," Ceecee seemed to shiver at the thought of it.

"And your golden god," said Samuel Burns, "probably went right home and poured himself into a boiling bath. It would kill one of us."

"But the point is," Charlotte said, "there he was, freezing, naked in a little stream of water at Ryusenji, all in worship of Fudo, the god of fire."

Richard's dark eyes came up and seemed for the tiniest moment to reflect sharp light. It was true; Fudo, the god of wisdom, was also thought of as the Japanese version of Acala. The conversation went on but Richard stopped listening. He found himself trying to remember something, but he couldn't decide even the nature of what it was he worked to recall. He had almost given up when he realized that the dropping of his biwa into the icy jowls of the black Pacific was the memory for which he had been searching. Perhaps he sensed some connection between the incident on the freighter and the ascetic at Ryusenji, but he was unable to put it together.

That night, after leaving Charlotte's apartment, Richard walked about for a time before returning to his room. When he at last did go to his room, he couldn't sleep, and instead paced up and down before his little image of Acala, thinking first of Charlotte's tale of the man at Ryusenji, then of his biwa and the invisible Pacific waters. And the next morning, not sure of why he went, he took the train to Fudomae and walked to Ryusenji.

He was surprised by the sharp sensation he experienced as he approached the pool which Charlotte had mentioned. He went through a gate to stand at the edge of the water and gazed at the two thin falls which dropped from large spigots high at the back of the pool. On the hillside above was caged what might have been an incarnation of Fudo, or perhaps a demon. The strange creature, housed in wire, made him shudder. The sensation he so overwhelmingly realized was one which told him he had been there before but he knew he had not, and could not recall any place he had visited to be likened to the limpid green water of the little fountain-falls or the green demon imprisoned beyond his reach.

He left the pool and climbed the steep stone stairs to the temple, and the sense of familiarity with the place would not leave him. Into a little well before the temple he dropped a hundred-yen coin and then he had an urge to sound the bell before the temple, to take hold of the rope and crash it against the circle of bronze; but the spirit he wished to call out would not, he knew, come in the person of the temple priest. Instead, he walked around the temple and mounted still another flight of stairs and stood before the seated Fudo at their head. The black Fudo seemed to stare rigidly back at him and Richard's eyes were caught by the Fudo's in fascination, and then Richard was shocked as, all at once, flames shot out from the sharp features of Fudo's face and there was a terrible metallic scraping sound, as if the large statue were about to burst from some pressure within it. Then the flames were gone, the stillness fell upon the severe black face and Richard began to tremble violently. Suddenly he emptied his pockets of all his coins and dropped them into the box before the seated Fudo and hurried back down both stairways and away from the temple, never looking back. He walked all the miles back to his room.

He seemed to have picked up a virus that day, because the next morning he had a small cough and felt a bit hot. He stayed home, reading and refusing to think about his frightening experience at Ryusenji. But the process of refusing to think about it was an active reminder in itself and he couldn't rid himself of a consciousness of it throughout the day. The cold lingered, making sleep difficult that night, and he remained in bed still the next morning, now unable to keep from thinking about the inexplicable sight of burning metal, the wretched sound, the unbearable feeling of having been to a remote Tokyo temple at some earlier time in his life. All of the elements of the experience were impossible and yet the reality of them was heavy upon him and he resolved never again to visit the temple at Fudomae.

When he left his bed that morning, he glanced at his small image of Acala and immediately decided to get rid of it. Looking at it reminded him of the great Fudo and he wanted no part of the memory. He got dressed, took the Acala and wrapped it carefully in brown paper and only then stopped to think of how to lose it. He might throw it into a nearby canal or merely toss it into the trash box at the street. The idea of disposing of it in so haphazard a way worried him, as if the image might be angered at any humiliation imposed upon it. As he stood uncertain, the image in his hands, it seemed that the paper began to warm his flesh and then the parcel quickly became so hot that his fingers were burned and he dropped the image to the floor. He started to pick it up but became afraid and instead let it lay there. He gazed at it in a kind of terror.

Rather than go out, Richard went back to bed. Although he remained in bed all morning, his virus grew worse and when Charlotte Adams came to see him, she found him in bed, mumbling in his sleep. She called a doctor, who said that Richard had a flu but that it was nothing to be alarmed about, and he left some pills in a tiny bottle and went away. The doctor gone, Charlotte sent for soup and cleaned up the apartment, unwrapping the Acala she had found on the floor and asking Richard if he had meant to sell it.

"Yes," he lied.

"Are you down on money?" she asked with what seemed sincere concern.

He shrugged, sitting up in bed and eating slowly from the soup she had given him. "Listen, don't bother about me. I'm all right." His words were sullen and yet he was glad she was there and hoped she might stay.

"But don't sell your beloved Acala." She set it gently on the bureau across from his bed. "If you need money, good lord, say so. You do have friends, Richard."

Before she left she assured him she would return the next afternoon, told him to stay in bed and asked him to promise that he wouldn't ever sell his Acala. He assented to all that she had asked, aware of the abruptly strong need of her friendship, wishing that she wouldn't leave his room but unable to ask her to remain. When she did leave, a feeling of complete aloneness overpowered him, and he put his eyes upon the Acala across the room, as if seeking in its cold graven face some evidence of companionship.

Soon he found himself staring for long minutes at the Acala, looking away from it only to stare at it again. Sometimes it seemed to move, he was sure he saw it wiggle and once he believed it had grinned hideously. He began to suspect that it might contain the spirit of the black Fudo at Ryusenji, that the spirit watched him through the Acala, that the Acala was alive but no friendly companion. When darkness at last filled the room he was relieved and pulled his covers over his head. After a long while of being unable to sleep he felt weak against tears crowding into his throat and he softly cried himself to sleep.

The Acala was there to greet his eyes in the morning. He studied it for some while and became convinced it was not sitting where it had been when he last saw it. It had moved, he thought, five or six inches to the left. There seemed no doubt but that it contained the spirit of life, that it watched him, even that it demanded of him, though he couldn't tell what.

He left his bed, dressed and, without taking breakfast, went out to catch a train to Fudomae.

In the chill morning light, the silent pool seemed to possess a beauty he hadn't seen the first time he had been there. Again, he felt that the sight of it belonged to his past, it was a place with which he was intimate, and he felt no embarrassment or discomfort in taking off his clothes at the pool's edge. Naked, he stepped into the frigid water and walked through it to stand beneath one of the little falls of water. He stood motionless, facing the wall, his head down, and the water chilled him until he was shaking and until the shaking began to hurt. His mind contained no thoughts and he didn't know how long he stood there. Without thinking about it he turned from the wall and walked back through the green water, noticing that an old man and a little boy watched him from beyond the fence, their faces both unbelieving and empty. He felt no concern about their presence. Shaking, he pulled his clothes onto his wet body and, still shaking, he left the grounds. He felt an unaccountable guilt at not having mounted the stairs to face the black Fudo but was too frightened of its power to produce fire to approach it.

He arrived home feeling sick at his stomach and still shivering and he vomited before going back to bed. It seemed only minutes later that Charlotte Adams came. He no longer had a wish to see her and closed his eyes and shook beneath the covers and the next thing he realized was that the doctor was beside the bed, leaning over him.

"I'll have a nurse brought in," the doctor was saying to Charlotte. "But I don't understand it at all. I don't see how a simple cold could have progressed this far. In a single day," he scratched his head and looked blurred to Richard, who closed his eyes again. "He shouldn't be allowed to get up at all, not for anything," the voice was more distant now. "He'll be all right of course, but he's got to stay warm. I can't be responsible if he doesn't cooperate." Richard heard scratching sounds and then a strange roaring sound way in the distance and he imagined that the great black Fudo walked down the stone stairs at Ryusenji, walked to the green pool beneath the temple, and there he stood and laughed. The doctor was still talking and his efficient chatter was like the game which had been played at Charlotte's apartment recently, useless, pointless, pitifully unaware of the real world, except that now Richard was not disgusted with the chatter; it amused him. "Will you stay until the nurse arrives?"

"Yes, of course," said Charlotte.

"All right then. Just keep him under the covers and I'll be back tonight. Now don't worry, don't worry. Your friend will be all right in a day or two."

That seemed to Richard an odd thing to say. Why, he thought, I'm all right now. The heat surging through his brain began to nourish other parts of his body and he saw flames and was not afraid of them. Soon he fell asleep.

He wasn't sure what time it was when he woke up. It was daylight. He had a vague memory of drinking something peculiar, he had no idea what, and he had a bad taste in his mouth. His stomach still felt sick and his head was hot. When he opened his eyes he saw a woman he didn't know just as she was leaving the room. Acala on the bureau across from him was smirking, as if in amusement with the woman, and Richard chuckled and slowly sat up. Sitting up was more difficult than he had expected and his brain felt fuzzy.

When the woman came back into the room Richard was nearly dressed and she tried to force him back onto the bed, speaking Japanese with intense excitement. Richard fought her weakly and at last had to bring up all his strength to heave her away from him. He continued to dress himself and the woman ran out, probably, Richard thought, to telephone for help. She would telephone Charlotte Adams or perhaps his mother, he wasn't sure what would be the proper thing for her to do because he wasn't sure who she was.

He left the room feeling ill and hot and every few seconds, going down the stairs, he had to stop for the faint sickness swimming in his head. The air outside was cold and it helped his head to become clearer and he stumbled up the street toward the train station.

He was just aware, in the train, that people didn't stand close to him, even though it seemed crowded. He hung somewhat limply to a hand strap and for the first time began to hear the strange noise of his breathing. It was more a cackle than a wheeze and he was coughing every minute or so. It didn't seem to matter. He even had a kind of elation at feeling so irresponsibly sick.

When he left the train at Fudomae he entered a wrong street and got lost, scuffing for thirty minutes or so along many narrow streets he couldn't recognize, before he chanced upon an entrance to Ryusenji. For some reason the morning air seemed to be growing less and less pure, it seemed to be getting dimmer rather than lighter, but he found his way to the gate which led into the green pool and he slowly and unsurely began to pull off his clothes, dropping them to the pavement.

The green water came not quite up to his knees and he got himself through the water until one of the spigots was just over his head and as he stood in it, he began to realize that the falling water was growing warm, then hot and hotter until at last he felt it burn into his flesh.

The Bewitched Businessman

by DINO BUZZATI

One summer day Giuseppe Gaspari, a forty-four-year-old grain merchant, arrived at the mountainous place in the country where his wife and children were staying. As soon as lunch was over, he went out alone for a walk. Setting forth on a steep trail up the mountain, he looked around to see what the scenery was like. In spite of the sunlight, he felt a sense of disappointment. He had hoped that the place would be in a romantic valley with pine and larch woods, girded by great cliffs. But instead it was a valley of gulches, closed in by squat hills shaped like cakes; it looked desolate and grim. A hunting resort, thought Gaspari, bewailing the fact that he had never been able to live, even for a few days, in one of those valleys, those very images of human happiness, which are surmounted by fantastic cliffs, where gleaming inns in the form of castles stand on the threshold of ancient forests that are weighted down with legend. And he reflected with bitterness that his whole life had been like this: nothing had actually been denied him, but everything had fallen short of his desire; it had been a middle way, which had met his need but had never given him the fullness of joy.

Meanwhile he had climbed quite a distance and, turning around, he was astonished to see that the landscape, the inn and the tennis court were already so small and remote. He was about to take the trail again when, from a lower ledge, he heard several voices.

Out of curiosity he now left the trail and, making his way among the brambles, reached the backbone of the ledge. Back there, hidden from the view of people who followed the normal road, a wild little vale opened before him, with abutments of red earth, steep and jagged. Here and there were sprinkled gray rocks, little bushes, the dry remains of a tree. About fifty feet higher up, the gorge turned left, plunging deep into the flank of the mountain. A place for snakes, burning with sunlight, strangely mysterious.

At sight of this, he was filled with joy; and he himself did not know why. The little valley offered no special beauties. Nevertheless it roused in him a number of very strong emotions which he had not felt for many years; those jagged banks, that deserted ditch that led away toward who knows what secrets, the little whispering landslips down there with burnt edges—it was as if he recognized them. Many years ago he had foreseen them, just like this—how many times, and what stupendous hours those had been! Exactly like this were the magic lands of dream and adventure that one longs for in the time of life when one hopes for everything.

But just below, behind a thin hedge of sticks and briars, five boys were having a conference. They were half-naked and had on strange caps, bands and sashes, in imitation of foreign or piratical clothes. One of them had a gun with a spring, the kind that hurls a stick, and he was the biggest one, about fourteen years old. The others were armed with bows made from branches of hazelnut; for arrows they used slivers of wood carved from the forks of small boughs.

"Listen," said the biggest one, who wore three feathers on his forehead. "It's nothing to me—I don't care about Sisto; you and Gino will take care of him, and cut him in two, I hope. Just so we go about it quietly; you must see that we take them by surprise."

Gaspari, listening to their talk, understood that they were playing Indians or else playing at war: the enemy were farther on, barricaded in a make-believe fortress, and Sisto was their chief, the strongest and most fearful. In order to capture the fort the five were going to use a plank about three feet long, which they had with them. It would also do for a bridge across the ditch or crevice (Gaspari had not understood clearly) to the enemy's lair. Two of them would go ahead into the depths of the valley, pretending to make a frontal attack; the other three would come in from the side, using the plank.

Meanwhile one of the five caught sight of Gaspari standing on the edge of the vale, that "old" man with his almost completely bald head, very high forehead and clear, kind eyes. "Look over there," he said to his companions, who were suddenly quiet, looking at the stranger diffidently.

"Good afternoon," said Gaspari, in the pleasantest mood. "I have been watching you . . . and now, when are you going to make the attack?"

It pleased the children that this strange man, instead of scolding them, seemed to want to encourage them. But they kept quiet, feeling shy.

Then Gaspari had an absurd impulse. He jumped down into the valley, and, his feet sinking in the sand that fell away under him, came leaping down toward the boys; they got to their feet. But he said to them:

"Do you want to take me with you? I will carry the plank, which is too heavy for you."

The boys smiled slightly. What did this stranger want, a man they had never seen in the neighborhood before? Then, finding his face sympathetic, they began to regard him with tolerance.

"But remember that Sisto is up there," the smallest one said, to see if he would be scared.

"But is Sisto so frightful?"

"He always wins," answered the child. "He sticks his fingers in your face, it seems like he is trying to put your eyes out. He is wicked, he is."

"Wicked? You wait and see; we shall capture him, all the same!" said Gaspari, much amused.

With this, they started out. Gaspari, with one of them to help him, picked up the board, which weighed much more than he would have expected. They began climbing up the gorge, walking on the stones at the bottom of it. The children looked at him with wonder. A strange thing: there was not a shadow of condescension about him, as there is about other grown men when they deign to play games. He seemed to be really serious about it.

At length they reached the point where the little valley turned aside. There they stopped and, hiding behind the rocks, stuck their heads out cautiously to reconnoiter. Gaspari, too, did the same thing, stretching out on the sand without any regard for his clothing.

Now he could see the remainder of the gulch, still more unusual and wilder than the other part. Cones of red earth that looked very fragile rose around him, soaring in a circle, like the spires of a dead cathedral. These cones had a restless and uneasy air, as if for centuries they had been there motionless, waiting for someone. And on top of the tallest one, which rose from the highest point in the valley, could be seen a sort of low wall made of stones, with three or four heads sticking up from it.

"There they are, over there, see them?" one of the five boys whispered to him.

He made a sign of assent; and he was puzzled. The distance was short, counted in feet. Nevertheless for a few moments he wondered how they had gotten up there, on that very distant cliff suspended between two abysses. Would they reach them before evening? But that was the impression of only a few seconds. What fancy could have passed through his mind? It was only a question of a few hundred feet!

Two of the boys stayed still, waiting. They would not go forward until a favorable moment came. The others, with Gaspari, were climbing up one side so as to reach the edge of the valley, taking care not to be seen.

"Go slow, do not loosen the stones!" advised Gaspari in a low tone, more concerned than any of the others with the outcome of the undertaking. "Courage, we'll be there soon."

They reached the edge, went down a few feet in a gully on the side, an entirely insignificant place. From there they again began the ascent; they were still carrying the plank.

The ground was well chosen. When they showed up again in the valley, the savages' little fort appeared to be only about ten meters away, and slightly below them. Now they had to climb right through the bushes and throw the board across a narrow crevice. The enemy were sitting there peacefully and among them Sisto stood out plainly, with a sort of mane on his head; a yellowish cardboard mask, intentionally frightening, hid half of his face. (But meanwhile a cloud came down over them, the sunlight disappeared, the little valley turned the color of lead.)

"Here we are," whispered Gaspari. "Now I go forward with the plank."

Whereupon, holding the board in his hands, he let himself fall slowly into the middle of the bushes, closely followed by the boys. Without the enemy being aware of them, they succeeded in reaching the desired point.

But here Gaspari stopped short, as if absorbed in thought (the cloud still hung over them and from afar came a plaintive cry like a wail). What a queer turn of events, he thought—only two hours ago I was in the inn, with my wife and the children, seated at table; and now I am in this unexplored land, thousands of miles away, fighting with savages.

Gaspari looked around him. No longer was there a little valley suitable for boys' games, nor were there ordinary hills like cakes, nor was there the road that led up the valley, or the inn, or the red tennis court. He saw below him huge cliffs, different from any he remembered, that fell away endlessly toward waves of forests; he saw beyond that the quaking reflection of deserts; and still farther on he perceived other lights, confused signs indicating the mystery of the world. And here in front of him, on top of the cliff, was a sinister fortified town; gloomy walls supported it crookedly and the flat roofs were crowned with skulls, gleaming in the sunlight, skulls that seemed to be laughing. The country of curses and myths, of intact solitudes, the ultimate truth granted in our dreams!

A wooden door (which did not exist) stood ajar; it was covered with mysterious signs, and groaned at every puff of wind. Gaspari was the closest to it, perhaps two feet away. He began to raise the plank slowly, so as to let one end of it drop on the opposite bank.

"Treachery!" shouted Sisto at that very moment, perceiving the attack, and jumped to his feet, laughing, armed with a great bow. When he spied Gaspari he stopped for a moment, surprised. Then he drew a wooden arrow out of his pocket, a harmless shaft; he fitted it into the cord of his bow and took aim.

But meanwhile from the half-open door covered with obscure signs (which did not exist) Gaspari saw a wizard come out, all scaly with leprosy and hell. He saw him draw himself up to a great height, his eyes gazing with a soulless stare, a bow in his hand, drawn back with infernal force. Gaspari let go of the plank then, and drew back in alarm. But the other one had already shot his arrow.

Struck in the chest, Gaspari fell among the bushes.

When he got back to the inn, night had already fallen.

He was exhausted. And he let himself collapse on a little bench on one side of the entrance to the inn. People came and went, some of them spoke to him, others did not recognize him because it was already dark.

But he did not pay any attention to the people, he was so intensely withdrawn into himself. And none of the people who passed by realized that he had an arrow stuck in the middle of his chest. A little shaft, perfectly turned, apparently made from a very hard wood of a dark color, stuck out about nine inches from his shirt, from the center of a bloody hole. Gaspari regarded it with a horror that was tempered by the curious happiness that was mixed with it. He had tried to pull it out but it hurt too much: the pieces at the sides of the point must have held it in his flesh. Every now and then blood gurgled from the wound. He felt it trickle down over his chest and stomach, and stick in the folds of his shirt.

Giuseppe Gaspari's hour had arrived then, and with poetic magnificence: cruel, too. Probably—he thought—he was going to die. Yet what a revenge against life, against people, talk, faces, mediocrities that had always surrounded him. What a stupendous vendetta! Oh, surely he was not returning from the little domestic valley that was only a few minutes' walk from the Corona Inn. But rather he was returning from a very remote land, aloof from human irreverence, a realm of sorcery, a pure place; and in order to get there other people (but not himself) would have had to cross oceans and then travel a long way through inhospitable solitudes, subject to hostile nature and to man's weaknesses; and even then they would not be sure of arriving. Whereas he on the other hand . . .

Yes, he, in his forties, had begun to play with children, believing in the game as they did; except that children have in them a sort of angelic lightness; whereas he had believed in all seriousness, with a heavy and rabid faith, which had been hatching for who knows how many idle years without his knowing it. So strong had been his faith that everything had been made real by it, the valley, the savages, even the blood. He had entered a world that was no longer his, he had crossed a border which after a certain time in life cannot be crossed with impunity. He had said "open!" to a secret door, half-jokingly, but the door had really opened. He had said "savages" and such had they become; "arrow," in jest, and a real arrow was killing him.

Now he was paying for the difficult enchantment, paying ransom; he had gone too far now to be able to return; but in recompense what a vendetta for him! Oh, let them expect him to dinner—his wife, his children, his friends at the inn, let them expect him for bridge that evening! The noodles in the soup, the boiled joint, the news on the radio: it made him laugh. He who had come forth from the shadowy corners of the earth!

"Beppino," called his wife from a terrace overhead where the tables were set outdoors: "Beppino, what are you doing, sitting there? And what have you been doing up until now? Still in shirtsleeves? Aren't you going to change? Do you know it's past eight? We are so hungry . . ."

". . . hungry . . ." Did Gaspari actually hear that voice? Or was he already too far away? With his right hand he made a vague gesture meaning that they should leave him alone, that they should get along without him, that it didn't matter a fig to him. He even smiled. And he felt a keen joy, although his breath was failing.

"Come along, Beppino," called out his wife. "Do you want to keep us waiting still longer? What is the matter with you? Why do you not answer? May one know why you do not answer?"

He bowed his head as if to say yes, without lifting it again. He was a real man, at long last, and not a poor wretch. A hero, no longer a worm, not the same as the others, but above them now. And alone. His head hung over his chest, as is suitable in death, and the cold lips kept on smiling slightly, expressing scorn: I have conquered you, miserable world, you were unable to keep me.

—Translated from the Italian by Sarah Gibbs

Time, Gentlemen!

by HORTENSE CALISHER

My father, born in 1861, and old enough to be my grandfather when I entered the world a year after his marriage to a woman twenty-two years younger than he, was by birth therefore a late Victorian. By 1900 he had already been of an age to have emigrated long since from South to North, and to have acquired both a business successful enough to permit him to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee at his usual haunts of Mouquin's and Delmonico's, and a rheumatism fashionable enough to require recuperation at Mt. Clemens Spa. But like so many youngest sons of those large families whose fortunes have either declined or not been built, he had from the first shown a precocious, Alger-like energy that—in his case combined with some of the bright fairy-tale luck that comes to the third sons in Grimm—was to keep him all his life younger in appearance and temperament than others of his span, pushing him constantly toward modernity, even while he dragged his feet, protesting. During the nineteen-twenties and thirties, when I knew him best, he was at the very least early Edwardian.

Since he was the youngest of a family so long-lived that he and his sisters and brothers, all close to seventy, still had their mother, and one so close-knit that all its branches lived within round-the-corner call of each other in Manhattan, I spent the indoor part of my childhood with old people—people old enough to regard my mother, in her thirties and forties, as a young person of promise who still owed them deference but might now and then be admitted to the family councils in a listening capacity. Her own fluttering efforts, either to freshen the décor of the anciently cluttered household she had married into, or to cling weakly to some of the habits of her contemporaries, were looked upon somewhat as the art nouveau bric-a-brac of an incoming bride might be regarded by the chatelaines of a manor house—with the tolerant knowledge that all this nonsense would eventually disappear.

Down at the bottom, a pebble at the roots of this banyan tree, was I, leading a curious double life, half of me in one century, the other half very nearly in the one preceding it. Once out of the house, on my way to school or in the long, spinning afternoons, I had the urchin street-freedom that descends upon the middle-class apartment-dweller's child at the age of seven or eight, when the nursemaid is passed on to the younger ones. As I whizzed around the block, one of a scabby-legged pack of skaters with two-wheelers clamped on their high brown shoes, or tore through forbidden cellars macaronied with steam pipes and elevator cables, leaving behind me shreds of plaid and a trail of bone underwear buttons, I was as much a child of my sector of the new century as any other. Yet, once the brown-metal, fire-proof door of our apartment closed behind me and I stood listening in the foyer, whose dark air had a dried-olive smell from the books musting double-rowed on the shelves, and a black-leather tint from the davenport that gloomed in the shadows, I stepped, without ever questioning it, into another element, one not present in the home-worlds of my fellows.

Entering this element, the raw light of the new decade had to humble itself past towering cabinets, through bead-crowded, wood-carved space in order to glint on the round, gold-wired spectacles of elderly people as they sat endlessly over coffee that streamed like a continuous soothing syrup from the kitchen. From there it had to cool itself against much marble and be strained through many yards of lace, before it might arrive, collected and plain once more, at the calm blue and white of my bedroom. Even then, it might have to rest resignedly on what someone had had the relentless patience to cut, sew and starch—my two weeks supply of fourteen white organdie sashes.

The element itself, however, was composed of much more—of all the ways that people had found to carve intaglio from the smaller moments of their lives, and more significantly, of all the spaces in between, when they found nothing to do at all, and did not seem to notice or mind. Within it, all the violent temperaments in our family, the daily puppet-clashes and doge intrigues, lay swaddled in a fleece of security, where life might recompose itself in the thick texture of those novels whose undemanding dramas flamed at writing desks and petered out in morning rooms. The element was, of course, the Victorian sense of time.

Possibly the best way to describe how this worked, or rather—since there was no sense of anything working—how things were, would be to chronicle the daily phenomenon known in our household as "getting father off." As a young man, my father had acquired a decorous old business that dealt wholesale in perfumes, soaps, complexion powders, essences and pomatums for the toilette, a trade of enough French frivolity to give his personality that tinge of the panache which it might not have had had he dealt in staples. Since he was the owner, had long since placed the factory under the supervision of one brother and the office under another, and had various cousins and brothers-in-law at a straggle of desks in between, he felt himself under no obligation to get downtown at any particular hour. Indeed, since he was a man of the most delicate family feelings and could not have borne to have any of his relatives think that he wished to lord it over them, it was probable that he preferred to schedule his arrival at the office at an hour late enough to keep him from ever knowing the hour of theirs.

My mother, however, although she had never been in the business world, had certain convictions about it that would have done her credit in a later era. She believed that a business run with such unpressurized ease, even enjoyment, must be well on its way to ruin, that one so nepotically staffed could survive only at the price of eternal vigilance, and that even if my father had managed to do very well for years before he met her, he now owed it to her self-respect, to his own Dun & Bradstreet rating, and to their joint children, to give at least the appearance of frenzied toil. She was a woman who would have felt much safer breathing hard and fast in the wake of one of those lunchless men whose race with their calendar ends only with death; and she was never to comprehend the real truth, that people loved to do business with my father because, in an already accelerating age, his dandified air of the coffeehouse, his relaxed and charmingly circuitous tongue, that dwelt much on anecdote and but lightly on orders and due dates, and above all, his trust in the "plenty" of time, made them feel participants in a commercial romance, gentlemen met by chance on the Rialto, who had decided to nurture a little affair.

But since she did *not* understand, each morning at home was a contest, a parable in which Conscientious Practicality, my mother, strove to get Imaginative Indolence, my father, out of the house somewhat nearer nine than noon. Imaginative always won, partly by refusing to notice the strategic lines of force sent out constantly, all morning, by Conscientious, and partly, as I came to believe, because Time itself, elsewhere being made to skip so violently, was coming to lean more and more sympathetically on my father's side.

I awake then, on a certain morning, almost any morning in the nineteen-twenties. Perhaps the milkman's clop-clopping horse has already been replaced by a rubber-tired van, but I hope not, since the horse's reflective, frequently interrupted pace is so much more suitable to what is going to follow. It is somewhere between six and seven o'clock back there; Josie, the maid, is still curled in her central cubicle in the angle of the long, wandering L that is our apartment; my grandmother sleeps, as she will for hours yet, in her separate wing; even my mother and my two-year-old brother, those disciples of *Achtung*, are still fast on their pillows.

But my father, strangely enough, as you might think, for a man who is always reassuring people that he and they have "all the time in the world," is already up and about, puttering in the kitchen for himself, as he loves to do. Not strange at all—he who is at home in Time rises with interest at the prospect of a new stretch of it; only its minions need to bury their heads. And if there is a little of the insomnia of the aging in his early habit, then it is never fretful, but spry and accepting, like a man who has been offered more food than he is hungry for, but will do what he can.

I get up too and go to the kitchen and we look at one another, each in our pajamas. And now a nice thing happens. He says nothing—no probing for the day's beginning or for me, as I reform myself out of dream—but merely reaches behind him, fumbling in a collection of brown paper bags he brought home last night, brings out a blood orange, of the kind he knows fascinates me, and hands it to me. Were my mother here she would say, "Say Good Morning to Your Father, say Thank You!"—not to me really, but to serve notice to the world that she is ready for her obligations, *en garde* for all the sword-thrusts of the day.

But she is much younger than we are. Two of a kind, we enter the dining room without saying a word. He is carrying the pot of coffee he has made, a low thing for a man in his position to do, as we both know, and akin to the smelly kippers he will toast for breakfast if not watched, and to the itinerant hobnobbing in delicatessens that produces the brown paper bags.

Saturdays, when my mother returns in a flurry of delivery boys, her beaver toque askew over cheeks fretted rosy from her plundering of the shops, and exclaims, "Done for the week, for the entire week!" my father may reply mildly, "A cuisine should saunter, m'dear. From day to day." He is thinking then perhaps of his old housekeeper in New Orleans, who used to cuddle his pears in tissue paper and reverse his wine bottles of an evening; but he will say nothing, because of the cheese he hid and forgot, that my mother found last week, that waved in a blossom of maggots when she lifted the sweating, china dome—and because she believes that wine makes you drunk. It is difficult, he knows, for a woman to have married an old man so full of comparisons. But it is difficult too—although this he never says—to have married out of one's century.

Now, however, in this hour while the morning freshens at the window, and some of the lamps that are always left burning to chart our household through the night are still on, Time moves for him as it should, like treacle, or even, as in my child's world, not at all.

Then, all at once as it seems, the morning paper thumps outside the hall door, the veteran clock in the hall gives its strangled cluck for the half hour, Josie lets fly the flush-handle in her bathroom with a bang that can be heard all over the house, the weakening lamps give up the ghost, my brother roars. My father gives me an untranslatable look that I understand perfectly.

The century, this one, has spoken; the contest has begun.

Mrs. Huber, my brother's nurse—who is as much on my mother's side as Josie, if anywhere, can be said to be on ours—passes us, bottle in hand, on her way to the kitchen, giving us a starched, thermometric nod for the tacky pair we are.

"Run, stop the paper boy," my father says to me. "I want to pay him." He ambles after me, and I leave them deep in confab at the hall door. I return to the table, at which I find my mother, in her morning chain-mail of ribbon and lace. She wears a boudoir cap to match, shaped like an upside-down ruffled spittoon, but beneath it, her voice is edged with modernity.

"Whom can he have found to talk to already!" she says.

When my father returns he has some paper greenery that he tries to stuff into the non-existent pants pocket of his pajamas. Tickets for the Irish Sweepstakes, it develops, that McDonough, the paper boy, has sold him. My mother sits still for a moment, then says in a stifled voice that, of all the fifty heads of families in this building it is probable that only my father has the time to learn the name of every mendicant who plies its halls, and hadn't he got a similar packet of tickets last week?—to which my father incautiously replies that the more coverage the better in any gamble. Gamble is one of the money-words that produces a known response in my mother; when it does not come as usual, I say it for her, since I have my own reasons for currying her favor this morning, and I knew by heart all the public expressions of her private terrors.

"Everything going out," I say, "nothing coming in."

My father's reaction to this is such as requires her telling him not to encourage me, and her commanding me to dress at once, or else I shall be late for school.

"Nonsense," he says, for secretly he resents the school for daring to impose temporal restrictions on any flesh of his flesh, "she has plenty of time." And such is my faith in his faith that, although he has thus made me late morning after morning, and I am consistently punished in the school world for being also a resident of his, it will be years before I am willing to admit that it was he who was out of step with them.

"What time is it?" says my mother, and in the same instant closes her eyes and puts the back of her hand against her capped brow. For there are at least eight running clocks in our house, in addition to broken ones in drawers and antique ones with stopped faces—almost one for every room—and not one agrees with any other. And this is so not only in our house, but in the houses of all the uncles and aunts on my paternal side. They all have something in their blood that slows clocks, my mother claims, but this is not true, for one clock we have breaks into rowdy tarantellas in the night and must be forcibly calmed—it is more probable that they confuse them. I do not mind our eight—it gives one such a choice.

"Oh, do *you* have a headache *too*," I say quickly. At once my father's hand, dry with years, is at my forehead, as I knew it would be, feeling for temperature. I droop co-operatively and let him see that I, nicknamed "hungry Henrietta," have pushed aside my plate. Death is a word never spoken in our family, since there are so many of an age to expect it, but my father, who will thus deny his own mortality, is always hearing its dragon breath snuffing near the heads of his children, as if he fears that providence will surely snatch from him early what he neglected to take from it until so late.

"Now, Joe," says my mother, "you know as well as I do that she will recover like magic as soon as it's safely ten o'clock!"

"Ah, now, now," he replies, his hand holding safe my cheek, "you know you'd never forgive yourself, if . . ."

My mother throws up her hands, and I see that this will not be one of the mornings when, enraged, she will threaten castor oil or the enema, or when, half convinced, she will suggest citrate of magnesia or Feenamint, or any other of those mild specifics she claps down us to warn the dark powers that she is aware. She gives me up, the better to concentrate on him. "Tailor came last night," she says. "He brought back your pearl-gray."

My father accepts the prod with grace, having won the first round, and goes off with a tuneless whistle, although he is not a whistling man. This means that even he does not believe me this morning. It is an expression also of his refusal to truckle to schools on principle, on the grounds that they are coarse instruments for the shaping of such quality material as he sends them. Above all, it means that his day has begun as a proper day should, easing itself so gently into the whorls of circumstance that it can scarcely be said to have moved, and with the first prerequisite of a Victorian household—with *everybody home*.

My mother has barely time enough to dress and make one rapid round trip through the apartment, setting higher the fires under everybody's caldron, and there he is back at the table—shaved, spatted, cologne on handkerchief, stickpin in lilac tie. And this provokes her most of all, and while his long view of life is so deliberate, he is not at all dilatory about its detail; it is hardly to be borne that of the thousands of trains he has had to make in his life he has, by not only the neatest but the calmest of margins, never missed one. Time is her enemy, and, she knows, the natural enemy of us all; it is not fair that my father's naïve trust in it works for him as pragmatically as some people's trust in God. She sits at table, thinking of the enviable tohu-bohu of shaving-cuts and indigestion in which the other fifty fathers have long since whirled away, and wonders if this morning, just this morning, after the incontestable interval of the *Tribune* and the grapefruit, she might not be able to get him off with a couple of three-minute eggs.

"Fix you some calfs-brains, Misser Joe?" This is Josie, bearing the first cup of coffee, and one of the clocks has just struck ten. My mother flinches—calves-brains have to be poached, and after the poaching, breaded, and after the breading, fried.

"Mmmm," he says, "and with black butter, eh Josie? Black butter, not brown."

Another clock—sometimes they do their best to be helpful—strikes the hour, and my mother murmurs rapidly and bitterly of all the duties before her, including the fact that she must be off to the bank, to which my father says nothing, for he knows that she will not leave the house before him, although he does not know why. It is because she must protect his reputation, since he will not, and she considers it infinitely low-class for a woman to be seen up and abroad when her man is still lounging at home. Forgotten by them, I listen, incognito unless I turn healthy before noon. Nested in the shawls that have been mustered against disease, I mull over which of them is the aristocrat, which the low, over why it is so hard to love the worthy, so warming to be in the presence of one who will allow himself to be deceived. Above all, I wonder which of them is right about Time, not knowing that it is more than my mother and father who do battle here. Contra, contra I hear their dividing voices, as, with an Eurasian aching, I hear them yet.

The doorbell rings and now my father rises, eager, nostrils sniffing the true pursuit of the morning. For the second prerequisite for a Victorian household is that all morning long its doors, front and back, be applied to by processions of those who either bring special services or require them. Before noon we will have had, beside our regular shipment of eggs from coquettishly pastoral places with names like Robin Roost, of French Vichy from the drug store, and panatela cigars from the little Spaniard in Harlem, also various but unvarying visits from upholsterers, dressmakers, opticians, even a bootlegger whose *ton,* like all the others, so remarkably suits us—a rococo little man, trapped like us, between two eras, who carries a cardcase and deals only in wine. In between come the variables, perhaps a former servant girl with her new baby, or a long-lost cousin with her old debts (both of them aware that petitions will not do as well in the afternoon, which is my mother's dominion), or perhaps an old-clothes man who does not yet know that we never sell anything off, we only buy. Even he is detained long enough to learn that he has one commodity for which my father will find some way to reward him—conversation.

"It's the Walker-Gordon man," my mother says, in triumph, and my father sits down. This is the man who delivers the special acidophilus milk for my brother, a routine meant to cease in the first month after birth but prolonged by my father so that the heir may have his traditions too. In other respects it has been a failure—the Walker-Gordon man will not stop to talk.

Providentially, Mrs. Huber enters to say that if my father wishes to pay his usual visit to the nursery, will he kindly do so at once, so that she may get her charge out in the sun "while it is high." As soon as he is gone, my mother puts on her hat, not that he will take the hint, but it makes her feel better, and besides, since there is no routine left to him now except his half hour's reading to my grandmother, and since this has been an exceptionally reasonable morning so far, it is just possible that, if no bells ring, she may get him off by eleven, which is at least a half hour better than par.

I am quite used to seeing her go about her housewifery for hours on end thus hatted; she was wearing one on that extraordinary day when, in a similar period of waiting, she suddenly lifted her petticoats, revealing to my pleased eye that although she had laughed at my yellow satin Christmas garters she sometimes wore them, took three steps back, and kicked the dining-room clock. There is red in her eye now as she looks in on me in passing, but she will kick no more clocks. The subsequent *sal volatile* and sweeping-up provided my father with an hour's valid delay, and the clock returned from repair "same like ever" just as the old watchmaker had promised—that is, running ten minutes later than the one in the hall.

But joy of joys, here he is and it is only eleven, and he has actually already completed his devoirs to his mother, his matins to his son—it must be the spring, ding-a-ding, for matters 'gin arise, time's on the run, and father makes for the hatrack, on which his bowler lies. . . . And two bells ring.

At the front door. At the back. And now there is no device of wit, verb or cachinnation by which I can follow the final counterpoint of my father, the *a cappella* exits and returns by which he halts, circles, hedges, rises to the high C of delay, and ultimately, coda, goes.

Let me try. The ring at the front door belongs to Mr. Krauss the cabinetmaker, who comes to us once a month, to feed the furniture. There is nothing *outré* about this; we have masses of elderly wood and veneer that apartment-house heat withers, and Mr. Krauss spends an earnest day feeding linseed oil and casauba to our parched gargoyles, griffons and lion-footed tables, never troubled by any fantasy that he might do as well by placing his supplies in the center of the arena and quickly taking his leave. He is a tall, cavernous German, full of Hegelian pauses through which occasionally climbs one memorable phrase, the kind of old-fashioned workingman whose society is always courted by urban men like my father. The ring at the back door belongs to Cyril, one of the West Indian elevator boys, who can also talk Creole. He has come to borrow my father's roulette wheel, and this I shall not bother to explain; if by now it does not seem perfectly natural, there is no more to be done. No, better to leave them at once, the three of them bogged there forever, Cyril's winsome causerie on one side, Krauss' silence on the other, and my father somewhere in between them, with his foot on the stile.

He goes at last, of course, although I never seem to see him do it, only hearing his parting, customary cry. It is his one mock-fierce threat, one so gay, so mild, so aptly like him, yet its *frisson* always travels up my spine as no threat of the cat-o'-nine-tails could. "Be a good girl!" he always cries, "else I'll throw you into the middle of next week!"

Now my mother is left in her bevy of women, free to chivy us back into her century. As dusk advances, her siege of him will be renewed by telephone, and pointed the other way, toward us, as she begins to doubt that he will ever again come in the door she was at such pains to get him out of; for an office where there is plenty of time is just as hard to leave, and all the way up the avenue from the subway station there are cracker-barrels that know Mr. Joe. Now, however, she rests. One more morning has passed without realizing her worse fear—that the dreadful, shiftless day will come when he will still be there for lunch.

But he comes, and evening with him, and all his clan gathered to him from block and cranny, and then his star rises to its full. For in the end he draws us all back with him into his calm antipodes. Supper-talk is slowed, appetites dreamy, now may our griffons protect us, our curtains swaddle. Even my mother has stopped her White Queen running and sinks in her chair, a little muzzy with life, as at those times when she can be persuaded to a single glass of ruby claret. I fall asleep on the davenport, smelling its ageless, mummy leather, hearing the murmur of the elders. The last thing I see is my father, his eyes sweet with triumph. The vital threats of existence are blending, yet endless, the furniture is fed. We are all together with him in the now, rocking in the upholstered moment, in the fur-lined teacup of Time. The lamps are lit for the night, against that death which is change. And tomorrow, *da capo,* it is all to do over again.

And now I am awake on another night, tonight. Thirty years have gone by, and I no longer hear the murmuring of the elders. All around me, as I slept back there, my own century was coming to the fore. Flappers, streaking by me in Stutzes and Auburns, were already disappearing over the edge of their era; each day the stock market climbed like the horses of Apollo, yet at nightfall had not come down. Later would come the false stillness of the thirties when hands hung heavy; then, with a proletarian clanking of machinery we would be off again, into a war, into the self-induced palpitations of the forties, as, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, we changed matter into light, outdistanced sound, and came roaring out upon the strait turnpike of the fifties in our new pink cars.

And now there is nothing left to outdistance, except Time. I am awake wherever I am; is it on the rim of the world, the lip of the Time-machine? All around me there is a cold, sublunary glare, the sourceless light of science fiction, that greens the skin, divorces cell from cell.

I know where I am now. If there are any gods in this place I must pray to them, as once one could to the comfortable old evils of Ra or Baal. I must pray to s-s-s, or b-oom. For this place is the middle of next week.

Then, from over the rim of the world, I hear voices, the dividing voices.

"Run! Run!" says my mother. "Can't you run a little faster!"

And then I hear my father's voice, Rhadamanthine, serene.

"You have time," says my father. "All the time in the world."

And from the pin point where I stand, I can see it, the old place, lit up bravely, as a fish bowl against the dark shadows of eternity, moving slowly while it persuades itself that it stands still—the whole improbable shebang, falling through the clear ether silently, with all its house lights on.

The Giant Fan

by PADDY CHAYEFSKY

This is a story about a young fellow named Edgar Castle, who was a Giant fan. Ever since he was a boy, he had been a Giant fan. He used to have furious debates with the other boys, whose allegiances, just as intense as his own, were foresworn, however, to the Yankees and the Dodgers. One day in 1933, when he was twelve years old, Edgar hit an eleven-year-old Dodger fan over the head with a brief case filled with school books, bringing to an end a discussion on who had the lower earned-run average, Tarzan Parmalee or Van Lingle Mungo. The stricken boy sank slowly to the ground, wailing piteously, and Edgar, horrified at what he had done, ran home, his heavy brief case knocking at his thin legs. He hid in the cellar until dinnertime, when the door at the top of the cellar stairs opened and the bulky, black shadow of his father blotted out the rectangular shaft of light issuing from the dining room above.

His father descended the stairs slowly.

"What happened," asked his father, "what happened with this kid you gave a concussion?"

Edgar scowled at the floor. "Aaaah," he muttered, "he said Mungo was a better pitcher than Parmalee."

Mr. Castle considered this explanation for a moment. "All right," he finally rumbled, "go upstairs and wash your face."

The boy scurried up the stairs. Mr. Castle went back to the kitchen where he said to his wife:

"They had a fight over baseball. One pitcher is better than the other pitcher, so he gives the other kid a concussion."

"Well," said Mrs. Castle, "he's twelve years old, and that's the most important thing in the world to twelve-year-olds, pitchers."

"Yeah," said Mr. Castle. He sat down heavily at the head of the dining room table and waited for the rest of his family to congregate.

Mr. Castle liked to think of himself as a stern parent; actually, the two children—besides Edgar, there was a daughter named Frances, a few years older than the boy—had long since learned that there was nothing to be feared from their father, despite his tall, heavy stature and his forbidding manner. As a result, Edgar grew up to be a sullen boy with a tendency to fling himself into tantrums when displeased. He was a bright boy, but lax in his studies, and several times Mr. Castle was called to school by various of Edgar's teachers.

"Your son," he would be told, "could be among the best students in this class, but he refuses to work."

On these occasions, Mr. Castle reprimanded the boy in a severe basso, but he preferred to remember that Edgar could have been among the smartest in his class.

"He's an exceptionally talented boy," Mr. Castle would tell his wife. "The teacher told me he was exceptional. He's going to be something yet."

So Edgar grew older under the illusion he was going to be something. At one time, he was going to be a doctor.

To a visiting uncle the fifteen-year-old boy once announced: "I'm going to be a surgeon. I figure I ought to make about fifteen thousand bucks a year."

The uncle laughed uproariously and said: "By God, he's going to be all right, this kid."

Edgar's penchant for medicine, however, was short-lived. He did poorly in his first biology course, and the simple dissections he was asked to perform made him so ill that once he had to leave the class and spend the rest of the morning in the school nurse's office. On the other hand, he rather enjoyed his English classes and promptly decided he would become a writer. For several days, he kept a diary in which he recorded cosmic references to life, and, in his long lonely hours of adolescent reverie, he dreamed that his diary was picked up by an enterprising publisher and that he was catapulted to fame overnight. Mentally, he composed the critics' reviews . . . "In this seventeen-year-old boy, we have a talent incredible for his years. . . ." "I was unable to put this book down: it is great!"

But in a short while this dream too wearied, and, as he approached his senior year in high school, his future seemed vague and amorphous. In his yearbook, he wrote down that he intended to go to Ohio State University, and that his ambition was to be a certified public accountant. The truth of the matter was that the only genuine ambition he had at seventeen was to lie, bronzed and sculptured, on endless beaches, locked in embrace with faceless Galateas.

He was a short thin boy with a shock of unruly hair and a sensitive cast of face undermined by a perpetual expression of petulance. He was an attractive boy, but he was convinced that he wasn't. Sometimes, he would lock himself in his room, put on a bathing suit and examine himself in his mirror from a variety of angles. These examinations left him depressed and sick with self-contempt. He would lie down on his bed and stare fixedly at the ceiling, accusing himself of being skinny and homely; and, occasionally, tears would well slowly in his eyes.

On Saturday nights he would preen himself for hours. He would come down the stairs, sleek in his blue suit.

"All right, Ma," he would say, "I'm going to be home late, so don't worry about me."

He would disappear quickly into the street.

Mr. Castle would turn to Mrs. Castle and say rather proudly: "I bet you, he's got hundreds of girls, that boy."

Actually, on these Saturday nights, he went to dances on Jerome Avenue where he paid fifty-five cents and spent the evening slouched against a wall, grumbling to his friends:

"Come on, let's cut outta here. Watta buncha dogs."

They would go down into the street, restless and disturbed, and wander into a bar for a round of beers which sometimes restored their sense of virility to them. Then they would buy the early editions of the Sunday papers and, on the bus ride home, pore over the sports pages, quarreling and shouting, attracting angry frowns from the other passengers. They would get off the bus around half-past one in the morning. There would be a great deal of laughter in the black streets, and then they would sadly wander off, each to his own home. In his dark room, as he stripped off his blue suit, a strange, gnawing sense of inadequacy would fill Edgar's stomach and his mind would rock with unspecified desires.

The Castles were living, in those years, in a pleasant two-story brick house in Forest Hills, Long Island. Mr. Castle owned a restaurant in Yonkers, and Mrs. Castle had a Negro girl come in daily to do the housework. However, in 1933, everything went wrong with Mr. Castle's affairs. He had invested badly in a second restaurant, and his own restaurant was irretrievably damaged by fire. For several months, Mr. Castle was unable to sleep. One night, Edgar, reading at a late hour, heard the reluctant squeaking of the steps as his father descended to the first floor, and then the steady, muffled padding of Mr. Castle's feet as he paced about from one room to another.

For the first time that he could remember, Edgar felt a swift, poignant sympathy for his father. He rose from his bed, clad only in pajamas, and carefully picked his way down the stairs. A light was shining in the dining room and overflowed into the living room, outlining the furniture in white. His father was seated at the dining room table in his undershirt and trousers, thinly shrouded behind a film of cigarette smoke. He was grimly playing solitaire. A wave of pity and affection for this gross, gaunt man swept over Edgar. He ambled shyly into the dining room and sat down at the other end of the table. His father did not look up, but he paused in his game.

For a moment, a thick silence hung between them, and then, suddenly, a half-caught moan escaped from Mr. Castle. Terrified, Edgar stood up from his seat. A series of barely stifled sobs now came out of Mr. Castle, and his shoulders shook and convulsed. Edgar turned and hurried back up the stairs and into his room. He locked the door behind him and sat on the edge of the bed for a long time, afraid to move a muscle.

A few months after this incident, the Castles sold their house and moved into a four-room apartment in Astoria, a lower bourgeois district filled with stores and shouting children. Edgar, who was going on eighteen then, felt the degeneration deeply. He was sullen and uncommunicative for weeks. He refused to make friends in his new neighborhood, and, instead, sulkily left the apartment after dinner every evening and took the subway to his old haunts where he wandered around looking for his old friends. But the childhood groups were long since broken up. Some of the boys were engaged to be married, or working at jobs, or away at college, and they were no longer to be found on the schoolyard corner fiercely debating batting averages. During these months Edgar felt particularly lonely and depressed, aware that some sort of change was expected of him but unable to rid himself of a feeling of futility.

An air of irritability settled over the Castles in their new apartment. Mr. Castle now spent his day in the kitchen, prattling to his wife of nebulous business enterprises. Nothing ever came of these plans and Mrs. Castle, normally a round, amiable woman, now engaged in quick, venomous exchanges with her husband. The daughter Frances, tall and heavy in her father's image, found a job as receptionist for an air-conditioning firm, but her salary was small and the mood of defeat continued to dominate the home.

In June of 1936, Edgar was graduated from De Witt Clinton High School. He won no prizes and received a routine scattering of applause as he passed in file on the platform to accept his diploma. He sat in the audience, anonymous in his class of six hundred boys, bored and restless. When the ceremony was over, he hurried his parents to the bus and resisted their affectionate congratulations with a dour face.

"Well, Edgar," his father said, "the world is in front of you."

He found a job, eventually, as a delivery boy for a messenger service, and then, in quick subsequent shifts, he worked for a florist, as a stock-clerk in a men's jewelry concern, as a floor boy for a furrier, and at last as a printer's apprentice.

In this last job, he remained for more than two years. The habits of his daily life became settled, and he accepted them with a kind of bitter detachment.

He rose at seven-thirty and ate a silent breakfast, his graying mother, grotesque in an old blue kimono with a rip at the shoulder, fussing wordlessly behind him and slipping the plates of food before him. Their apartment was a rear one, and only a tattered edge of daylight came in through the kitchen window. It always seemed to Edgar that it was either raining out or about to rain, and it was a constant surprise to him to walk out into the street and find the sun high over the tops of the dull apartment houses. He bought a *Daily News* and settled in his subway seat for the hour's ride down to work. He read the paper thoroughly, even the sports section, but the names he saw in the box scores were mostly unfamiliar to him. His interest in baseball had faded into the dubious oblivion of his childhood.

At nine o'clock he arrived at his place of business, a small, dark little print shop, almost unnoticed in the flurry of other shops on West Twenty-Eighth Street. His boss, Mr. Kubelsky, was already there, a little, bald-headed man, bent over his hand press, his thin arms moving with mechanical precision.

Mr. Kubelsky adored his work, and there were occasional moments when this profound respect for his craft communicated itself to Edgar. Sometimes, when he pushed the black button and the press responded with a great clacking and movement of steel arms, when he clamped in the chases and checked the impression of the tympan, when he made his first simple compositions and plucked the ems and ens from the space cabinets . . . in these moments, a surge of pride in his skill flooded Edgar, and he enjoyed a strange, fleeting warmth.

He was fond of Mr. Kubelsky, and there were periods when the days yielded themselves one into the other and he regarded life with an amiable placidity.

His family, however, disapproved of his job.

"What kind of work is that?" his mother complained. "You come home every night with dirty fingers."

His father, who was aging quickly, said to him:

"Edgar, is this what you want to be? A printer? I mean, how much can you make in a job like that? Even if you owned your own shop, what could you make at the outside? A hundred a week? A hundred and a quarter? I'll talk to some of my friends, maybe we can find you a place in a bank or an insurance firm. At least, you won't have to work like a common laborer."

He felt trapped. He had a constant desire to bolt from wherever he was and hitchhike to another part of the country. There he would start again, humbly, and work his way up. He would be a clerk in a store, work hard, persevere, graduate to a junior partnership and eventually to a master tycoon. He saw himself as an office boy in a law firm, staying on after hours and poring over the thick tomes of law under one glaring bulb. One night, the senior partner of the law firm discovers him there. "Good God! What enterprise!" He is immediately given responsible things to do, astounding everyone with his ingenuity and charm. He is given a special dispensation by the National Bar Association to practice law without a university degree and grows famous as a defender of the poor and underprivileged. . . .

One day, March 16, 1942, he was awakened as always by his mother tugging at his shoulder. He sat up in bed, and, looking out the window into the endless rooftops, he regarded the advent of another day. He was conscious of a wispy bundle of his sister's stockings on the floor near his feet, a garter belt, his own unpressed trousers lying draped over the old overstuffed chair, a half-eaten apple on the table. Off in the kitchen, he heard the saccharine grossness of his sister and the mumbling of his mother. Suddenly, every inevitable detail of his day passed through his mind in a quick kaleidoscopic *montage*. It stretched before him, the unvarying familiarity of his life. He found that he was breathing heavily and he felt that in a moment he would burst into a hundred pieces. He stood suddenly erect and opened his mouth as if to scream, but all that escaped him was a long, asthmatic wheeze.

Behind him, he heard his sister crying "Good-bye! Good-bye!," the closing of the apartment door, and then a moment of silence.

His mother appeared in the kitchen doorway.

"Well, listen, hurry up, what's the matter with you?"

He padded off to the bathroom and picked up the tube of tooth paste, but a foretaste of its antiseptic flavor made him feel sick. He put the tube back on the sink and stared at his haggard face in the mirror.

Suddenly, he turned and went back into the kitchen. His mother was patiently stirring scrambled eggs with a fork.

"Listen, Ma," he said, "I'm going to tell you something, but don't get excited."

His mother turned slowly to him.

"Listen, Ma," he said, "I want to enlist in the Army. What the hell, Ma, we're at war, and somebody's got to go out and fight the Nazis."

His mother looked at him and shrugged. "Patriot," she muttered. She went out of the kitchen.

He stood in his pajamas, confused and disturbed.

"There happens to be such a thing as patriotism," he called to his mother in the other room.

There was no answer. He dressed quickly and went into the street, looking for someone to whom he could announce his noble decision. He found no one.

The morning was bright and clear. He felt free, violently and exultantly free. He started to whistle. He felt it should be a patriotic song. He squeezed his eyes together, but, for the life of him, he couldn't remember the opening bars to "The Star-Spangled Banner."

He served in the Army with reasonable ineptitude for four years. When he was discharged, he was twenty-six years old. He had developed a penchant for beer and he had put on some weight. The features of his face seemed to have broadened.

He arrived home on a Saturday at nine-thirty in the morning. His father had died during the war, and his mother and sister had moved again, this time to an even shabbier flat in the East Bronx. They greeted him, blowzy and unkempt in their sleeping clothes, hugged him and cried. They pushed him into the kitchen and foisted fruit, cheese and containers of milk on him.

"Boy!" he cried. "Am I glad to get outta that Army!"

For the next few days he slept late, sauntered around his neighborhood and told whomever he talked to, as he fingered the material of his civilian clothes:

"Boy! Am I glad to get into these again!"

He phoned the few of his friends who were still available and went to the tavern with them and drank beers.

"Boy," he said, "I was in the best damn outfit in the whole goddam Army, let me tell you. We saw plenty, let me tell you. Boy, one time, those goddam Nazis, four days of '88's . . . . My sergeant, he was the best goddam sergeant in the whole goddam Army! . . . I tell you about him, boy, was he tough. . . ."

A subtle transformation had occurred in Edgar. He was no longer a lonely boy, provoking himself with nebulous successes. He was now a member of the best damn outfit in the best damn division with the best goddam general in the whole goddam Army. Somewhere in the course of his four years of Army, the wild dreams of self-realization with which he plunged into his infantry career had slowly capitulated to the drab olive anonymity of his uniform. He had learned how to identify himself with the success of other people.

As the weeks passed, however, the old sense of futility returned. He was twenty-six years old now, and he saw no way in which to turn. The idea of going back to Mr. Kubelsky's print shop and working for thirty cents an hour offended his sense of age and position.

He dutifully read the help-wanted ads in the Sunday *Times* and carefully wrote out long letters to prospective employers.

"Dear Sir," he wrote. "Although I do not have a great deal of experience in production work, I promise you that I will be

(1) Intelligent
(2) Resourceful
(3) Enterprising
(4) Loyal

I assure you that I will work very hard. I was in the 413th Regiment of the 104th Infantry Division and fought in four theatres of war."

He received only one answer to all his meticulously printed letters. It was a life-insurance firm that offered him a job on a commission basis.

"Take it! Take it!" his mother cried. "At least try something. Don't just sit around the house all day and night, driving us both crazy."

"Who the hell wants to be an insurance salesman?" cried Edgar in return.

He was governed now by a dreadful sense of failure, a fear that he would never amount to anything. He took long walks at night until three and four in the morning, which worried his mother terribly. He slept till one or two in the afternoon and quickly disappeared out into the streets and eventually a movie. He returned home for supper and sullenly avoided his mother's anxious face. At night, he went to the tavern with his few friends. They would telephone girls, all of them huddled around one booth, suggesting things to say to the young man actually making the call. Occasionally he went out on dates on which he talked about nothing but his Army experiences, and then, terrified that he was boring the girl, he made bald, desperate and unsuccessful attempts to make love. He went home after these dates burning with shame and inadequacy.

One day his mother appealed to her brother, who was the proprietor of a small automobile repair shop on Southern Boulevard. He came to the house and talked to Edgar.

"Listen, Edgar, you're worrying your mother to death."

"What do you want me to do, Uncle Frank?" he cried, tears in his eyes. "Be a delivery boy? All I want's a decent job."

"All right Edgar, don't get excited."

Edgar began to cry and sob. "Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ!" he mumbled. "If I could just get started somewhere. I'll work my way up. Don't worry about me. I'm going to be very successful someday. Don't worry about me. You're all going to be very proud of me." He turned to his mother, who was watching him tearfully. "Ma! Ma!" he cried. "You're going to be proud of me! I promise!"

This was in 1948, when he was twenty-seven years old.

Hacking was exasperating work, and his tendency toward irascibility became his natural manner. He swore fluently at every interruption of his tortured passage through the crowded traffic of evening Manhattan, and he came home, overflowing with bile.

"Whatta bunch of lousy drivers in this city, let me tell you! Some stupid fuck cut in front of me on Forty-Third Street. There's no goddam fucking left turn on Forty-Third Street. I should have smashed his fucking fenders, the stupid. . . ."

He himself drove recklessly, and he prided himself on his daring and hustle. He began now to indulge in petty chicanery. He shortchanged his fares, and once kept a purse containing four dollars that was left in his cab.

In December 1949, he married a girl named Helen Schaefer. She was the daughter of one of his mother's cousins, and he met her at a family wedding that took place in Brooklyn.

The wedding was a large catered affair, at which the guests introduced themselves by saying: "I'm from the bride's side," or "I'm from the groom's side." After the ceremony, they all took their seats at given tables and banged with their knives and forks, a signal for the groom to kiss his new wife. This brought scattered handclaps and cheers from the assembled company, and at once someone else would begin banging his knife against the table. Between the courses of the dinner, a five-piece band struck up thin, wavering renditions of popular songs, and a few of the younger guests would step out on the floor and dance. Invariably, at weddings of this sort, somebody's grandmother is propelled onto the dance floor and jigs up and down for a few bars of music, while everyone comments on her vitality, and the bride's father roams around the tables, roaring with laughter at everything that is said to him and pretending to be blind drunk.

The three Castles sat at table 22, which was an indication of how they now rated in the family hierarchy. They shared the table with some poor relatives from the bride's side, and an elderly couple who seemed to know absolutely no one there, but who beamed broadly at everyone throughout the evening.

Whenever the band struck up a tune, Mrs. Castle leaned across to Edgar and said:

"Why don't you ask one of those girls over there to dance?"

She nodded with her head at the table where the ushers and bridesmaids sat, a little oppressed by their tuxedos and organdie dresses.

Edgar frowned at his mother's suggestions.

"Look, Ma, let me alone. If I want to dance, I'll dance, don't worry about me."

But the thickness of the air, the high little shrieks of laughter, the rustling of skirts, the waves of bosoms and hips, the slender ankles and high heels all provoked in him a restless desire for a girl. He drank five or six shots of Scotch, stood up from his chair and crossed the floor to the bridesmaids' table. He had picked out a slender brunette to ask for a dance, but, just as he reached the table, the tuxedoed usher beside the girl took her arm and edged her out onto the dance floor. For a moment Edgar stood poised over the table; then, he leaned quickly forward to a plump brown-haired girl, and muttered:

"You want to dance?"

The girl was Helen Schaefer.

There began a long irritating relationship, broken by angry words and cryptic resentments. They went to the movies, to parties, and clutched at each other on park benches, breathing against each other's cheeks, and separating at the end of the evening, flushed and unhappy.

There were occasional moments of warmth between them, strange exciting moments for Edgar. When he went to the box office of a movie and said "Two," and he looked into the lobby and saw Helen, a little stout but not unattractive, there entered into him a feeling of proprietorship and comfort, and he rather liked the idea of being taken for man and wife. When his friends arranged the New Year's Eve party, they said:

"Well, you're taking Helen, right? Now, we got to get a girl for Anthony."

He was very proud that he was not Anthony.

Sometimes, in the hushed dark of her hallway, as they pressed themselves against each other, he would be conscious of a gentle sweetness on Helen's face and be filled with a surge of tenderness.

"All right, all right," he would say gruffly. "I'll give you a call tomorrow at the office sometime, O.K.?"

She would smile at him, a smile filled with warmth and ingenuousness, and he would go home confused by a variety of feelings he could not understand.

Once he ordered a taxi, and they sat in the back embracing.

"Just once," he explained to Helen, "I want to sit inna back and neck instead sitting inna front and watch."

After weeks of irresolution, they decided to marry. Once the decision was made he was delighted. He would tell his fares before he had even gotten into second gear:

"I'm getting married next month. What do you think of that?"

They were married on December 18, 1949. It was a small affair, held in Helen's parents' apartment. There were only fourteen people there, and the refreshments consisted of two or three bottles of wine and some plain cake.

Their honeymoon was three days spent in Washington, D. C., where they were bored and, on the third day, never even bothered to leave their hotel room.

They returned to New York and rented a two-room apartment with kitchenette in Brooklyn, a few blocks from Helen's parents. Helen quit her job as typist and took up the duties of housewife. Their routine of living was imposed on them by Edgar's hours. He went off to his hacking at six in the evening and returned between three and four in the morning. During the first few weeks, Helen was waiting for him when he came home, or he prodded her in the ribs and awakened her. She would promptly get out of bed, bringing with her the sensual warmth of her sleep, and they would have coffee and toast in the small kitchen. Then, silently and almost cold-bloodedly, they made love to each other. Eventually, this became an unpleasant interlude, pursued more out of a sense of obligation to their concept of married life than out of love or physical need for each other. To Helen, it became another marital duty like scrubbing the kitchen floor. To Edgar, it was the only evidence he had that he was a man.

He now arose with the jangling of the alarm clock at noon, feeling as if his whole body were covered with the scratchy stubble that was on his cheeks. Days would go by when he neither brushed his teeth nor shaved, for these simple sanitations seemed to require inconceivable energy. He would don his wrinkled trousers and stare down at the wide bundle under the blankets. Often, he was filled with a profound distaste for his wife. A cold sheet of frustration would slip down over his heart, and he would tremble a little. He thought wild thoughts of divorce, of running away. He would stare at himself in the mirror. At twenty-nine, he had developed a paunch. He was now short and squat, swarthy and somber. He had constant desires to burst into tears, and, in the solitude of the kitchenette, he sometimes permitted himself little whimpering sounds.

He had a tendency now to stop at a bar near his cousin Stanley's house on his way home at two-thirty in the morning. He would take a few drinks. Often this was enough to make him maudlin. He would mutter to himself the misgivings of his soul.

"I'm no good, I'm no good," he would mutter. "What am I? I'm a goddam hackie, a bum. I'm no good."

He would suddenly wheel on the bartender, engrossed in mumbled conversation with another patron, and cry out:

"I could be a surgeon now, make fifty thousand dollars a year, believe me!"

"Sure, sure," said the bartender.

He would stagger out into the streets and reel to the subway.

"I'm all right," he would call out into the night air. "Don't worry about me. I'm all right."

He would get into the subway and ride the hour's trip to his home, let himself silently into the bedroom, quickly strip and climb into bed cautiously, lest he awaken his wife.

Sometimes, he would have the most poignant desire to press his head under her outflung arm and ask for pity, but he restrained himself out of a primitive sense of shame.

In January of 1950, his cousin Stanley installed a radio in the taxi.

One evening, he was cruising along midtown Broadway when the radio, which had been droning out an incessant parade of music and announcements, burst into a recorded rendition of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," and a hearty voice said:

"Well, here we are again at the Polo Grounds. It's the first night game of the season, between the Giants and Dodgers, brought to you with the compliments of Schaefer's Pale Dry, the beer that's both light and dry. . . ."

There followed a spirited jingle about Schaefer's Pale Dry.

In the beginning, Edgar listened with only half an ear, but when the Giants eventually won three-to-two, he was elated as if it had been his own personal success. He pulled up to a diner on Sixth Avenue and went in and ordered a cup of coffee. He said to the counterman:

"Did you hear the game tonight?"

"Who won?"

"The Giants, three-to-two. It was a helluva game, let me tell you. It was two-two going into the eighth, when Lockman tripled off the rightfield wall. So they walked the next batter, I forget his name, and they was figuring for two, you know, so the pitcher, I forget his name, threw seven straight balls, and they pulled him out, so the next guy, Thompson, flies to center and Lockman soars after the catch. . . ."

The flip argot of the game felt familiar and comforting in his mouth. "Oh, that Lockman," said the counterman, "he's all right."

"You a Giant fan?" said Edgar.

The counterman nodded. Edgar felt a sudden wave of affinity for him.

He began to follow the Giants closely. He bought the early morning editions of the newspapers and read the accounts of the day's game with a painstaking thoroughness. He learned the names, the batting averages, the physical health and the dispositions of all the players. He got into furious debates with his neighbors, who were all naturally Dodger fans.

"Aaaah, Reese! Reese!" he would snort. "When did Reese ever hit over .280? He had one good season, he hit .274! There are four shortstops inna league better than Reese! Marion is better! Buddy Kerr is better! Yeah, Kerr! Buddy Kerr! He can out-hit Reese. . . . Aaaah, drop dead! . . . You Dodger fans stink!"

Every afternoon that the Giants played, he either sat glued to the radio in his living room or, if his wife insisted on cleaning the carpets with the vacuum cleaner and creating static, he hurried down to the corner tavern where one game or another was inevitably being televised. Here, he got into feverish discussions over the game, often terminating in blows.

On August 11, 1950, around eight-thirty in the evening, Edgar picked up a fare at Forty-Seventh Street and Lexington Avenue, a large, bulky man named Dollesandro, who turned out to be a Dodger fan. He had just seen the afternoon game at Ebbets Field in which Preacher Roe had pitched a three-hitter and, although three hours and more had passed since the game, he was still in a rollicking frame of mind and bursting to recapitulate the whole game to Edgar.

"The only time Roe was in trouble," Mr. Dollesandro reported, "was in the sixth. They got a man on first and a man on third with one down, and Kiner was batting. Kiner hadn't hit the ball out of the infield in three trips. He throws two strikes to Kiner, and then gets him to knock a ball down to Robinson. It was a good shot, and I tell you, boy, I thought it was going right out into right. But like Posts' Sugar Crisp, Robinson was right there in the spot. . . ."

"Robinson stinks," muttered Edgar.

"Robinson is the greatest second baseman in the sport," announced Mr. Dollesandro.

"Don't make me laugh," said Edgar.

"Who's better?" demanded Mr. Dollesandro.

"Stanky," said Edgar.

"Oh, come on please," said Mr. Dollesandro. "They don't belong in the same league."

Edgar drew up to a red light on Fiftieth Street and Second Avenue. He turned in his seat to look at the Dodger fan.

"Robinson can't go to his right," he informed Mr. Dollesandro.

"Your light just turned green," said Mr. Dollesandro.

"Robinson stinks!" roared Edgar.

Behind the cab, a long line of impatient drivers began a tumult of honking. The blaring noise filled Edgar's ears, and he began to shout.

"Shaddup! Shaddup!" he shouted.

An ocean of revolt, furious and red, engulfed him.

"Watsa matter with you?" said Mr. Dollesandro.

Edgar suddenly leaned across the seat and brought the cold steel coin-changer down with a crash on Mr. Dollesandro's head. The Dodger fan gasped. A flurry of nickels and dimes spurted from the coin-changer and fell on the floor of the taxi.

"A million dollars," muttered Edgar, as he struck Mr. Dollesandro again. "A million dollars."

He had climbed over the seat through the open glass partition and was standing over Mr. Dollesandro striking him again and again with the coin-changer. The great weight of the Dodger fan pushed against his legs, and sank onto the floor of his cab. For a moment, Edgar surveyed the gross, prostrate body, and then wrenched the door of the taxi open and fled into the streets.

He was picked up a few hours later in a bar in the Bronx. He was sipping a cool glass of Schaefer's Pale Dry.

"What did you kill that guy for?" he was asked.

The short, swarthy little taxi driver scowled.

"Aaaah, he said Robinson was a better second baseman than Stanky."

The Hidden Woman

by COLETTE

For a long time he watched the whirl of masqueraders before him, filled with a vague ache from the mixture of colors and the simultaneous blare of two orchestras, set too closely together. His monk's hood pressed against his temples; a nervous pain was starting in the back of his nose. But he was not restless; he rather savored this mingling of malaise and pleasure that permitted the hours to slip by unheeded. He had roamed the corridors of the Opera, drunk the silvery dust that rose from the dance floor, recognized bored friends, and wound around his neck the listless arms of an extremely fat girl, disguised humorously as a sylph. Ill at ease in his domino, stumbling along like all men unused to skirts, this doctor in monk's garb nevertheless did not dare to remove his mask, nor his hood, because of a schoolboy lie.

"I must spend tomorrow night in Nogent," he had told his wife, the night before. "I've just had a call, and I'm afraid that my patient, you know, that poor old lady. . . . When I'd so been looking forward to that ball, like a kid, fancy that. Isn't it silly, a man my age who's never been to an Opera Ball?"

"Very silly, darling, very, very silly! Why, if I'd known, I might not even have married you. . . ."

She laughed, and he gazed admiringly at her narrow face, delicately pink and tapering like a sugared almond.

"You . . . you wouldn't care to go, would you, to the Green-and-Purple Ball? Even without me, if you'd be amused, darling. . . "

She had shivered, as at the sight of a slug or a repulsively dirty man in the street, a long shiver of distaste that went through her hair, her slender hands, her throat rising from its white dress.

"Oh, not me! Do you see me in a crowd like that, with all those pawing hands. . . . What's there to say, I'm not prudish, I . . . I simply bristle up."

Leaning against the balustrade of the loggia, above the great staircase, he mused on this trembling hind, while he contemplated, directly in front of him, two enormous, square, black-nailed hands clutched against the naked back of a sultana. Sprouting from the lace sleeves of a Venetian nobleman, they dug into the white feminine flesh as though it were dough. . . . Because he was thinking of her, he jumped as he heard beside him a little cough, an odd way his wife had of clearing her throat. . . . He turned and saw, seated astride the balustrade, someone in impenetrable full-length disguise, a Pierrot in a smock with huge sleeves, loose pantaloons, a skullcap, and a white-plaster paint that coated what little skin was visible around the lace-ruffled mask. The fluid fabric of the costume and the skullcap, a weave of dark purple and silver, gleamed like the sea-eel that is fished by night with an iron drag hook from boats with resin-lit lanterns. Struck with astonishment, he waited to hear again that little cough, but it did not come. Pierrot-eel continued to sit, unconcerned, tapping one heel against the balusters, and revealing of his person only two satin slippers and a hand gloved in black and folded on his hip. The two oblique slits in the velvet mask, carefully screened with tulle, let through a smothered fire whose color could not be distinguished.

He almost called, "Irene!" then restrained himself, remembering his own lie. Always clumsy at play-acting, he decided not to try disguising his voice. Pierrot scratched his bottom, with an idle and somewhat common gesture, and the husband breathed again. "Ah, it isn't she!"

But Pierrot pulled from his pocket a flat golden box, opened it to take out a lipstick, and the worried husband recognized an antique snuffbox, his last birthday gift to her. . . . He placed his left hand over the pained region of his heart, with a gesture so abrupt and so involuntarily theatrical that Pierrot-eel remarked him.

"Declaration of love, purple Domino?"

Half stifled by surprise, the suspense, the sensation of living a bad dream, he failed to answer; he was still listening to the barely disguised voice—the voice of his wife. The Eel continued to stare at him, sprawled impudently, head cocked like a bird's; then shrugged her shoulders, swung both feet to the floor and walked away. Her action set free the worried husband, who, restored to an active and normal jealousy, began thinking once more and set out at a leisurely pace to follow his wife.

"She must be here for some one, with some one. In less than an hour, I shall know all."

A hundred hooded monks in purple or green gave sufficient guarantee that he would not be noticed or recognized. Nonchalantly Irene walked ahead of him; he was astonished to observe how indolently she swayed her hips and dragged her feet, as though wearing Turkish sandals. A Byzantine gentleman in emerald and gold brocade seized her as she went past, and she bent backward in his arms, suddenly thin, as though the embrace would cut her in two. The husband ran forward and reached the couple in time to hear Irene's flattering cry, "You big brute!"

She moved on, with the same laggard and relaxed gait, stopping here and there, idling outside the open doors of the boxes, and seldom looking back. She hesitated at the foot of a staircase, swerved, went back toward the entrance to the orchestra, insinuated her way into a noisy group and pressed forward, squeezing through with slithery skill, with the exact motion of a razor sliding into its case. Ten arms held her prisoner, an all but naked wrestler pushed her roughly down on the ledge of the parquet boxes and held her there. She yielded under the weight of the naked man, threw back her head in a laugh that was covered by all the other laughter, and the man in the purple hood saw her teeth gleam under the ruffle of her mask. Then she got away, effortlessly, and sat down on the steps leading down to the dance floor. Standing behind her, an arm's length away, her husband continued to watch. She straightened her mask, brushed her rumpled smock, tightened her skullcap. She seemed as serene as though she were alone, and was on her way again after a few minutes' rest. She put her arms around the shoulders of a knight who wordlessly invited her to dance, and she danced, clinging to him.

"That's he," said the husband to himself.

But she spoke not a word to the armored knight with the moist skin, and left him peaceably after the dance. She drank a glass of champagne at the buffet, a second glass, paid, stood dead still and curious among screaming women as two men started to row. She amused herself by closing her satanic little hands, like black claws, around the white throat of a Dutch girl in a gold cap, who shrieked nervously.

At last the worried man who was following her saw her pause, as though jostled from her path, beside a young man who had collapsed on a bench, out of breath, and was fanning himself with a mask. She leaned over, disdainfully took by the chin his handsome coarse vivid face, and kissed the panting half-opened mouth. . . .

But the husband, instead of leaping forward and wresting apart the two joined mouths, disappeared into the crowd. Dismayed, he no longer feared, he no longer hoped for betrayal. He was sure now that Irene did not know this dance-tipsy boy whom she was kissing, nor the naked strong-man; he was sure that she was waiting for no one, seeking no one, and that, casting aside like a sucked grape the lips that she was now holding under her own, she would be on the move the next instant, prowl further still, pluck another passing stranger, forget him, wanting only to taste, until that time of utter lassitude and the return home, the monstrous delight of being alone, true to her nature as a free animal, of being the unknown woman, to whom a little mask and an all-transforming costume had given back her incurable solitude and her brazen innocence.

—Translated from the French by George Davis

Covetousness

by CYRIL CONNOLLY

"After all, Jonathan, you can't take it with you." At lunch, yesterday—Friday—from Brenda, that hoary old cliché again. It set me thinking. Of course, logistically, one couldn't. There's no point in actually being buried with the loot like Tutankhamen, though I would enjoy the sight of my coffin being followed to the vault by a procession of packing cases and tea chests. Crated rather than cremated. "For the present, if nobody minds, I'm quite content to stay here."

But, come to think of it, there *is* a way of taking it with one, and that is to endow the whole thing as a museum. One preserves one's name, and it keeps the collection together. More than one dare expect from one's own family. They shall have front seats at the opening—if they can get away from their jobs. I can picture their faces. I'm certainly not going to take *them* with me:

The Edax Foundation: A small closed collection, museum and library open thrice yearly to the general public, with microfilm material available to accredited students. Endowed by Mr. Jonathan Edax, this small closed collection contains some of the choicest examples of etc., etc., illustrating the taste and discrimination of its munificent founder. A fitting memorial to the days when it was still possible for one man, etc., etc. . . .

"The human eye deteriorates all it looks at"—whoever wrote that should be my first Curator. Museum. Mausoleum. Except on the three annual viewing days, the collection should be kept in permanent darkness. Pharaoh would have approved. But what about tomb-robbers? Photoscopic devices, the most up to date in existence, give instant warning of the minutest disturbance, such as the flashing of a light.

But these are morbid thoughts. My collections are in-complete. And I am still here to complete them. I shall go round to little Truslove. He's sure to be away.

Thomas Truslove. My oldest friend. Once a most gifted young poet, he is now completely forgotten and spends all his time on television, editorial boards, P.E.N. Club activities, book-of-the-month clubs and American lecture tours. Last week in Buffalo, this week in Rome—he only comes to England in his sabbatical year. But—and this is the point—he continues to be deluged with every pamphlet, every privately printed book that comes out. You can find anything at Truslove's. When I go round I always take a second edition of something, or a second issue, or a defective copy, and substitute it, when his back's turned, for the right one. To him that hath shall be given. He never notices—only likes painting, anyway. Sometimes he tries most generously to present me with my own rejections, the ignorant booby. Today I took round a second edition of Hopkins. Virginia Truslove opened the door.

"You've come to see Thomas? He's in Borneo. But he'll be back tomorrow morning. We're lunching with the Clarks." I gave her the gimlet gaze. "I've come to see *you.*" Virginia was what some people would consider 'still a beautiful woman.' She looked rather flustered. *"Mille grazie!* Do come in." I put down my coat in the hall and walked straight into the library. "Would you like some tea?"

"Nothing better. I'd give my soul for a nice cup of tea—the way you always make it."

"I'll get it myself!"

It always works! Drinks, no—too often they're on the table. But tea!

"I'd give my soul for it"—and down she goes to the basement. Ten clear minutes and always a warning rattle on the way back!

Sure enough, there was the right Hopkins—1918. The exchange was the work of a moment, and I dived into the pamphlets: *Poems Written in Discouragement,* only fifty copies—"To my young friend Thomas the Rhymer, W. B. Yeats"; *Prufrock and Other Observations*—"To Thomas from Tom."

I didn't know where to begin. Even in my inside jacket pocket a slim volume might run a slim risk of being detected. "Dear Thomas, Even you won't dare to print this, Ezra." Jiminy cricket! Which shall it be—or why not all three?

Oh!

"Wasn't I quick! That's the electric kettle. I hope you haven't been too bored."

"Just leafing through a few of Thomas's old circulars."

"Aren't they a nuisance? As soon as he comes back we're going to have a thorough cleanout. Books are bad enough—but manuscripts, letters—he's kept *everything*."

"Would you like me to go through them for you?"

"How angelic—but why should you do all this for me?"

"For an excellent reason." And I looked down at her with my gimlet glance.

"There ought to be a law against it. Look at this one—'With some trepidation, Dylan.' Why can't all these poets let poor Thomas alone. Nobody can print anything without inflicting a copy on him. He's like the British Museum."

"I could start right now."

"We'd better wait till he comes back. We might throw away a drawing by mistake. He won't be long. He's only gone to deliver a message at a conference."

"In Borneo?"

"He's beamed at the Orient, you know."

"Fortunate fellow!"

She put the pamphlets back in the glass-fronted bookcase and set the tea tray on the table. Damned interference.

When I got home with my Hopkins, Brenda was waiting.

"Jonathan—where have you *been*?"

"Went to return a book to old Truslove."

"Caroline's fallen downstairs."

"Did she hurt herself?"

"No, thank God. Not this time."

"Well then, it's not very important."

"It happens to be important, because she fell downstairs because you won't put up a gate, and you won't put up a gate because you're too mean to spend three pounds on one because all your money goes on candlesticks and teapots and filthy old books and china and glass and furniture and silver and candlesticks and teapots."

Teapots! It's quite true I had been too busy with that bookcase to have a proper look. The Trusloves were just the kind of people to inherit some Queen Anne. Back to the Trusloves first thing tomorrow!

"Teapots with no tea, decanters with no wine, centerpieces for non-existent dinners—and Caroline could break her neck for all you'd care."

"Why don't you get the gate yourself?"

"Out of what *you* give me?" .

Now I happened to have read that small children have a very good sense of self-preservation even when descending stairs, and that if they fall their little bodies, with so much fat and water content, are extraordinarily resilient. I shut myself into my study and accommodated Hopkins—"I am gall, I am heartburn"—among my 'Recent Acquisitions.'

A few minutes later the telephone rang: "It's me, Virginia. I'm so worried. Thomas has just cabled he's stopping off at Jakarta to judge some Indonesian Abstracts. He'll be late for the Clarks and miss his Lit. Soc. What shall I do?"

"You'd better take me with you."

"Oh, what a good idea! Jon, you're so thoughtful for me!"

I remembered that I hadn't quite finished my egg at luncheon and retired to the pantry. The Clarks! *Veritable cave d'Aladdin.* My luck was in. I found the egg and went back to my study. When I stand up before my largest bookcase I call it 'being at the Controls.' I feel like a captain on the bridge, or Sandy Macpherson at his Wurlitzer. I expect the whole thing to sink down through the floor at the end of my virtuoso performance.

This evening I took out the keys of the plate chests, then I inspected the green and yellow Sèvres, the Vincennes, the Chelsea and some of the Meissen, and went back to the Controls again. That Yeats, that Eliot, that Auden manuscript, perhaps weighed a few ounces between them, occupied the same space as one bad novel, yet were worth several hundred pounds and represented for me the conclusion of years of search and patient effort. Good old Truslove—if he'd only been born a few years earlier and had been given *Mosada* 'or *A Lume Spento!*

"God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste. My taste was me."

I couldn't get Hopkins out of my head. "My taste was me"—what a title for an autobiography! And when one's taste is flawless—near-perfect, and matched by a nose and an eye for a bargain and a bump of curiosity and righteous ambition to despoil the Philistine, there's no end to what one can pick up. To know what someone else values is to be already on the way to possessing it.

Saturday: Today I woke with a tiny worry. On the landing I heard Brenda and Caroline: "One two three four, one and two and three and four," no doubt a charming maternal tableau. Then I remembered. Why hadn't I noticed the teapot? After our lunch we must go back there. And I would take a few old copies of *Horizon* and *Penguin New Writing* to stuff up any gaps I made in the tidying.

With silver and china it's not so easy. One can't 'borrow' somebody's dinner service or pocket a *garniture de cheminée*. One has to learn to carry cash and make unpredictable offers. Carry cash! That hurts. Still, I am a gentleman, and a gentleman is someone who can reasonably expect to live in the same style and demand the same treatment as his forefathers in a society which has gone completely haywire. The world owes me a living, says the parasite. No. I owe myself a living, says the gentleman. Let Edax hold what Edax held; and a little bit over for safety.

Telephone! "It's me, Virginia. Jonathan, I'm so worried I've rung up the Clarks and they'd rather the lunch was put off till Thomas got back. And now I've no one to lunch with today." The skinflints. To hell with all of them.

"Well, lunch you know is never very easy for me. But perhaps we can meet afterwards."

"But if you were free to lunch with the Clarks I thought perhaps you might . . ."

"And get poisoned in one of those filthy restaurants? I see a man got thrombosis from scallops Mornay."

"Well then—you must come and lunch here. I'll have to see what I can do with my own fair fingers. But don't expect the Crown Derby."

"You have some Crown Derby?"

"Well, I don't know what it is, of course . . ."

Why do they all say *of course*?

". . . But I do know it's fearfully old and Granny thought the world of it. It's supposed to be terribly valuable."

"It sounds like Mason's Ironstone."

"What's that?"

"I said we'll have to turn it over and look at the marks."

"No need to be improper."

"Very well then, one o'clock."

Silly bitch. The last woman I took out to lunch cost me £12,000 for four words. Well, with her "Yes" you could say it made five words. I could still hear her in the next room, with her kitchen cough, moving about and making lists of all the things that she and Caroline 'simply had to have'—shoes, shirts, sheets, socks, chocs, each item more perishable than the last—and the Spanish girl with her list, too. Thank God there was one sane person in this household of crazy women.

The Edax Endowment. A Thought at the Controls: some of my books—some of the rarest—have other people's bookplates, coats of arms, country house libraries (people with country house libraries are among the biggest suckers in existence). Should I leave the bookplates in? Or steam them off? Or leave it to the executors? But who are my executors? Do I know a single person who isn't a bloody fool? One might choose an heir by examination. My will would be an examination paper. Or a treasure hunt. But with all these bibliographies flying around they'd be bound to cheat. But today I shall put it aside, I feel sound as a Getty—and all atingle for the chase.

"Jonathan—where are you *going?*"

"Out to lunch—for a change."

"But your egg."

"Stuff it."

"And the shopping money."

"Borrow from the Spanish girl."

"Jonathan. Do you realize you haven't paid her wages for three weeks? Caroline's shoes are worn out. Do you expect us to live on air—when do you think I last went to the hairdresser?"

"Oh for God's sake. Get a long-playing record of yourself and send it to the Naggers' Club. Best years of your life. Worn your fingers to the bone. Waiting on me hand and foot. All the jazz."

The usual screams and yowls, in which Caroline joins with automatic mimicry. Thank God somebody keeps his head in this bedlam. Luckily I had chosen my cane and so had no further cause to linger. I blessed the Fermier-Général who had selected the perfectly fitting gold pommel with the reassuring chinoiserie, and I blessed the country house croquet set where I had found it.

The Spanish girl! Once the Trusloves' proudest possession—nothing she wouldn't do—laundry, mending, no evenings out. I soon got my eye on her. Took a bit of winkling, too—I told her that her employers were atheists who would probably poison her. Brenda is a Catholic, you see. Marriage is a life sentence with her. So I give—and expect—no quarter. I had to go to church myself, just to convince the *chica*, and listen to the sermon. "Nor his ox nor his ass nor his manservant nor his maidservant." All the jazz. These Spaniards! Eat you out of house and home!

One of my grievances against old Truslove is that he would choose to live halfway between two fare-stages. One either has a goodish walk, or has to go on and break into a coin. Luckily it was a fine day.

Virginia opened the door. "Look at him. Isn't he smart? With the hat and the cane and the Sherlock Holmes profile. Positively satanic."

Damned impertinence. "You don't look too bad yourself." She was what our ancestors called a handsome woman, chivalrously adding 'very fine eyes.' Poor Truslove. Twenty years of marriage, say a pound a week to feed her and another for pin money—thousands of pounds down the drain. Every woman after forty is a wasting asset.

"I know how you love beautiful things. I've got out all my treasures." We sat down to a fricassee of chicken and a bottle of rosé. King's Pattern everywhere; all the silver was heavily embossed and the Crown Derby was quite respectable Coalport. "The place for good china is under lock and key." I wagged an admonitory finger, "And now, since you've spoilt me so thoroughly, may I make one more request?"

"Granted as soon as asked."

"Can we have tea instead of coffee?" She looked rather sadly at the Cona machine. "I'll go and make it myself." Five minutes to go, with that damned electric kettle. I made a rush at the bookcase. It was locked.

It was one of those big mahogany efforts, and there, behind the glass, I could see all the presentation copies and the enigmatic plain backs of the slimmer volumes. It wasn't really locked, I discovered, only jammed, otherwise I should have felt deeply insulted. I gave a good pull and the whole front came away; the hinges had gone. A sheet of glass fell forward and splintered round my head, badly cutting the hand which I raised to protect it. Virginia entered with the tray—"Oh you poor thing—let me bandage it. You must have a tourniquet. Why, you've bled all over the manuscripts."

It was true. "Thomas—even you won't dare to print this" had become completely illegible. She thrust a pamphlet in my pocket—"here, have one of these for luck." And then I spotted the teapot. It was hexagonal, genuine Queen Anne. I even got it up high enough to see the Britannia standard. One would commit murder for such a piece—or worse. What havoc it would wreak among my Georgian urns and melons! It would run to thousands.

"Jonathan," said Virginia, "I've been wanting to talk to you for a very long time. You're not happy, are you?" I gave her the old gimlet. "Poor old Jon—you can't deceive me. You see I know all about you and Brenda." "There's nothing to know." "Yes—that's just what I do know—and I know you only married her because she was engaged to Thomas." "Virginia—" "And when you took Brenda—can't you see, Jonathan—there was nothing left for me to do but marry him." "Virginia—"

"Stop—and I know too what a marriage with nothing is like, because that's what mine is. Married to a poster, a voice on a dictaphone, an airplane reservation. We can't go on like this, Jonathan. I'm forty now and you must be . . ." "Virginia!" "Wait—don't worry—you shall have me. You've been so sweet, so patient, so understanding—coming always to see me when he's out—yet never a word disloyal to him, always his best friend. Don't think I haven't noticed, dispelling my loneliness, my emptiness—and you so big, so quiet, so kind." "Virginia!" "Wait—silly. I'm all yours now. Listen. I've cabled: 'Don't hurry back. Clark's lunch postponed. All well—Virginia.' Now aren't I rather clever!"

"Virginia—the teapot. Whose is it?" "Mine, you silly-billy. Do you think we would be drinking tea out of it at this moment if it were his? Whither I go, it goes—

my dowry—it will be about all I have. There used to be a silly old kettle on a stand as high as myself." "Virginia, I feel faint. My wrist. I must see a doctor. No, I can walk, thank you."

Once in the street I pulled out the pamphlet she had given me. Unbelievable—the ultimate rarity! *The Bourbon Rose and Other Poems* by Alberic Chute. Privately printed, Newport Pagnell, 1886. His first book—of which up till now only two copies were known, Hayward's and the Bodleian's. Alberic Chute, that exquisite talent, silenced it was said by some evil tentacle of the Wilde scandal after his third and most remarkable book of poems. He would be nearly ninety, if this post-Raphaelite pre-Imagist were alive . . .

If he were alive! Why not?—and if he is alive then he shall inscribe *The Bourbon Rose* for me and I will possess a better copy than either of the others. I made for a telephone box. There he was! Alberic Chute, Squire's Mount, Hampstead. Should I ring up to make sure? Often the worst of all methods. First they hang up on you, and then they won't let you in. Desperate occasions require desperate remedies. I took a taxi. When I rang the bell there was a commotion. The door was opened by an elderly man. "Can I see Mr. Chute?" "Mr. Chute is very ill indeed and can see no one." "The matter is extremely urgent." "I am afraid any question of urgency is now purely relative." The last word gave me a clue. "You see, I am his son." "Mr. Chute was unmarried." "That is my tragedy, not his." "Your name." "It would mean nothing. Here are my credentials." I held up the book to him. "Newport Pagnell—yes—he did live there, for a very considerable time. Well, you had better come in. I am Doctor Prout."

He led me through to a room on the ground floor. "I should warn you it may come at any moment. My patient is in uraemia."

It was a small sitting room with no good pieces, into which a brass bed had recently been moved. On this was lying a tiny old man with closed eyes and a nose like a tin-opener, his hands milking the coverlet. A nurse was standing by. She held a finger to her lips. With my cane in my bandaged hand and *The Bourbon Rose* in the other I tiptoed over.

I have managed to live more years than I care to consider without any close experience of death. There is nothing in such a phenomenon to appeal to the collector. The foothills of Death and Love are, however, hunting grounds for such of us as lay up treasure on earth and pursue enduring artifacts rather than the illusions of common humanity. I have often found a long face at a memorial service lead to substantial pickings.

I was brooding on certain gaps that still needed closing before my serried ranks of Americana could be brought up to battle strength, when the nurse disappeared behind a screen. Almost immediately the sick man opened his eyes and seemed to want to sit up. He favored me with a penetrating stare. I brandished *The Bourbon Rose* before him and reached for my pen; but to do that I had to lean the cane against the bed and a rash movement of his caused it to slip so that the heavy gold knob with its mandarins and pagodas fell with a clatter on the parquet. With glaring eye the old poet tried to heave himself up and thrust forward, his hand jerking at me as the nurse rushed round. "You—" he gasped and fell backward. I had enough presence of mind as the doctor entered to retrieve my cane and sink my head on my arms. "My father . . ."

I was more than relieved to get away on a pretext that I had to telephone, and I had run quite a distance from Squire's Mount, my black felt hat in one hand, my cane in the other, before I realized that I had left *The Bourbon Rose* behind. Agony! I felt such a stinging sense of loss that I could almost have wept. The greedy old bastard!

By felicitous combinations of the London Transport system I made my way home, for I pined to be at the Controls again. My reference library alone is more extensive than all the books to be found in an ordinary household; it starts in my bedroom and spills over the upper landing. I can trace the mark on a piece of china, the owners of a crest, the rubric of a goldsmith, the succeeding possessors of a book or manuscript, the vicissitudes of some piece in the saleroom, in a matter of minutes. They are the jig-tools of my occupation.

Before letting myself in I sent off three cables to Truslove: care of P.E.N. Club, Jakarta; British Council, Singapore; and Nehru, Delhi. "Clarks upfed threaten off-brush. Hurry!" Then I made a dash for the landing.

Great God! At the top of the stairs a hideous little gate of white metal, stuck onto the wall at each side by suction pads. For a household of hurdlers!

"Brenda," I shouted. She came out, smiling. "I thought you'd be surprised. Now our daughter—for you seem to forget that she is yours as well as mine—can grow up without risking her life every few minutes." "How did you pay for it?" "I charged it." "You have no account." "I put it down on yours." "You PUT IT DOWN!" I felt a lump of rage surge up and choke me, like when Caroline tore the book jackets. "You filthy extravagant slut, I'll sue you." "Anal-erotic madman." "I'll put a notice in the papers. I'll hound you out of my house."

The telephone rang in my bedroom. (I permit no outgoing calls.) "It's me, Virginia. Darling. He's on his way back. We must leave at once. I'm desperate." "Impossible. I can't ever see you again." "Then I shall kill myself. Now." "Goodbye." These crazy women! Suddenly I had a vision in all its leaden moonglow perfection of the little hexagonal teapot. Now was my chance. I ran out of my room and took a flying kick at that bloody gate.

"Aaaaaaaahh. . . ."

A verdict of death by misadventure was returned on Mr. Jonathan Edax, the well-known connoisseur and collector who broke his neck by falling down the stairs at his home in Holland Park on Saturday night. The stairs were exceptionally steep and a gate had recently been installed at the top of them by Mrs. Edax; it had presumably been insecurely attached. The deceased had appeared to be in a disturbed frame of mind at the prospect of making his will. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Truslove were present at the inquest but were not called upon to give evidence. Jonathan Hagan Edax was born in 1895 at Bedford, where his father was a prosperous solicitor. After completing his studies, he had early made his mark in the correspondence columns of learned periodicals and was soon recognized as a formidable opponent in the auction room at a time when it was still possible for one man, etc., etc.

The Copper Dancer

by MARIE DERMOÛT

A houseboy—no longer one she recognized from the old days—was waiting to receive her as she entered. "Master say, master still in town, but master come soon," he announced, and forthwith conducted her down the hall to the closed-in veranda at the back of the house, his study, which had been her room too. There, he withdrew and left her to herself.

She removed her hat, laid it down somewhere, and looked around the room. It didn't seem that much had really changed, though there was something rather bare and neglected about it all. She stood still for a moment, stroking her hand repeatedly across her forehead, high up, where her hair began—it was as though somewhere inside her head there was a tiny, exposed spot of silence, exposed, yet hedged off, sealed off from all the rest, and infinitely vulnerable. He had been her first husband and she had lived with him in this house for five years, and now. . . .

She encountered some difficulty in tracing the way back. They had parted. After two years she had remarried—fourteen years ago by now—she had had two children from this second marriage, her elder daughter was already in the first grade at the high school . . . she couldn't help smiling a moment at the thought of it. Not once in all those years had they set eyes on each other again. He had remained living in this house—he had not remarried himself—and all those years she had lived in the Outer Islands, far, far away. But now that unexpected circumstances, a death in the family, had brought her back to these parts, she had felt the urge to look him up, just once, had let a train go for it. Why not? They had parted good friends. And if you hadn't been cured of one another in sixteen years, when would you ever be?

She looked about her again. His room *had* changed, after all. Still the same bookcases, his writing desk, the tall drawing table—he was an engineer, an adviser on factory design—the same cane furniture: a small settee and a couple of big, comfortable chairs, arranged about a low, round table; the red lacquer tea trolley, the wine cellaret, the hideous little table with his pipes and cigarettes. The same lightshade hanging from the ceiling, the same couple of porcelain reading lamps, one on the bookcase, the other on the desk. One or two etchings on the walls—the old cathedral at Haarlem, a goat in a meadow.

All the same windows stood open looking onto the garden. The neglected pool with its lotus leaves, the green trees, the disaster of a rock garden—they were all precisely the same as before. And from the two windows at the back, still the same view down onto the rocky boulders, the bamboo thickets. And the mountain would be there too, though hidden now behind heavy, black rainclouds.

But between the two windows, high up, on a narrow ledge, stood a statue, a statue of a dancing girl. *That* had not been there before—*that* was new. She stepped up to it, peered at it and listened to the story it told her.

A flat, round copper disc, with a few lumps on it, hollows, tufts of grass—as though meant to represent the ground—was supported on the backs of six copper elephants. They stood in a circle, spaced out at regular intervals, their rumps under the copper disc, each with only part of its neck, its head, with the twinkling, deep-set little eyes, the two great flaps of ears, the slightly raised trunk, the tusks, filed-off flat like a tame elephant's, only the two round, powerful front legs, planted side by side, protruding from underneath. On top of the disc stood a copper tree, with a trunk swelling out toward the roots and spreading out, skyward, into a mass of branches, each branch dividing up in turn into ever finer branches and twigs, covered with leaves, blossoms.

Under the tree stood a girl, a dancer, also in copper. She wore only a wide, tenuous skirt, clasped to her waist by an elaborately embroidered girdle, and a few rings around her ankles. She had come to a sudden halt in a whirling gyration, and stood breathless, still poised on her toes, her feet held in a tense arch. The outline of her long, slim legs, with the knees pressed firmly together, could be discerned underneath the thin skirt, which was drawn up into tight little folds on her one hip, swirling out on the other in a wide and graceful fan of pleats. She held her two arms arched above her head, so taut that the slender, naked upper part of her body seemed elongated, the armpits deep wells, her small, high breasts pulled even higher. The hair combed smooth on her head, the artfully coiled knot tilted slightly backward, the eyes closed—though no longer quite closed now. Above her, behind her, the branches of the tree formed a niche—yet she was standing clear of the tree; there were just two branches that strayed out toward her, almost touching her head, one on either side.

On the one branch two little monkeys sat together, hands and feet clasped firmly around it, their long tails drooping, their grinning little muzzles bent toward the dancing girl's ear, ready to whisper some mischievous secret into it. And on the other side perched two turtle-doves—they were almost as big as the monkeys—and they sat half facing each other, as though they had just finished billing and cooing and were now bending their heads to one side, looking longingly at the dancer and cooing softly into her ear.

A little further away someone was kneeling on the ground. He must be the musician. He had laid down his round, stringed instrument, with its long neck, at his side. Dressed in a tabard, a cap on his head, he kneeled there, his body bowed—his forehead was actually touching the ground—his arms extended full-length, his clawing hands clasped together, only a few inches from the dancer's feet. He was a hideous little fellow, a hunchback, with too large a head for his body and huge, protruding, batlike ears sticking out of his cap; sandals far too large for him were almost rolling off his skinny feet.

And as if all this were not enough, in the copper tree hung fragile little garlands of turquoise stones—were they flowers, blossoms, fruit?—here, there, everywhere: round ones, long ones, small ones, big ones, as big as coffee beans, and still bigger ones, in that hard opaque forget-me-not blue.

And yet the story was not entitled "The Copper Tree" or "The Turquoise Flowers," but "The Copper Dancer." She couldn't take her eyes off her. She was beautiful. And all the time she looked at her, she felt a vague nostalgia for something, she could not have said for what. She was so absorbed, she did not hear him arrive until he was already in the room. She turned away from the girl dancer and stood facing him.

He had become much older but had not really changed. His fair hair thinner, the hollows at the temples deeper, the lines around the nose and mouth sharper, the now deeper-set gray eyes—it all made his face seem narrower, his forehead higher. He'd become leaner too, and his gait was more stooping. Yet his way of moving about, of walking, was the same as before—"elegant" would have been the word for it, if he'd been a woman, but there was nothing feminine about him—and that reserve, that self-control of his, that air of the spiritual about his being, were even more pronounced now than they had been in the old days, as though he were now more himself than he had ever been before. And when she set eyes on him, she knew she should not have come.

He was standing right in front of her—must she hold out a hand? Both hands? But she was spared the decision for, with a rapid movement, he had placed his hands on her shoulders, in that way of his, had bent over her—he was much taller than she—had kissed her somewhere in the region of the mouth, turned her around to face the Copper Dancer, one hand on her arm, and had asked, "And what do you think of my dancing girl?"

He loosened his grip without waiting for her reply and looked around the room. "What! Haven't they even brought you any tea?"

His tone was soft and insinuating, but she noticed that his voice, his way of speaking, had changed. More rapid, more nervous, she felt.

He had rung for the houseboy, ordered tea and fetched cigarettes.

"Come and sit down and let me have a look at you," he said. "How are you? How's life been treating you? Well? Have you changed much? Let's see now . . . yes . . . yes, you've changed!"

His head cocked slightly backward and aslant, he let his eyes run over her; interested, admiring even—let his eyes go past her. He looked at her, but he did not see her. He had never actually seen her. He wasn't seeing her now and he hadn't formerly, *never once*. If only he had wanted to see her, really see her.

Was she beginning again? Was she going to start walking again, as she had done in the past, in the daytime, at night, as though in a dream, down the hollow road, between high banks, too high for her to look over them, searching for the house, that *must* be somewhere and which she was sure to find in the end. The empty house—if she looked in through the tattered blinds, she saw that there was no longer even furniture left in its rooms, the remover's van had already departed.

But she didn't want to do that, no, no! Keep calm, just say to yourself: I'm thirty-nine years old—just that—hold on tight to that! On the verge of becoming old, whatever they may say. It's peaceful, being old—*carpe diem*, you say then. *Carpe diem*—this day, the day of the teatime visit. Make the best of it!

Make the best of the fact that he's sitting now at your side, at a table, in a room. The tea tray is there before you—"Shall I pour out?" you ask, and then, if you want to look at him, well, look at him. If you want to hear his voice, ask him something, it doesn't matter what. If you want to have him closer at your side, stand up, go up to him and lay your hand on his cheek, the way you always used to, and see what happens. And if you want to stay with him, ask, "Shall I stay with you?"

It doesn't need to happen that way, it mustn't . . . it can . . . all of it can happen, as long as this teatime visit still lasts. "The blessed present," they call that. Make the best of the blessed present, oh woman.

All right, all right, she said to herself. She wanted to, she wanted to terribly—but she couldn't. Her chair stood so close to the Copper Dancer that she couldn't avoid seeing her from where she sat—the entire group, so transfixed and yet so violently animated, so barbarically beautiful and yet so barbarically ugly. It kept distracting her attention, as though for her the principal personage was no longer the man but the dancer.

They sat there a long time together.

She poured him a cup of tea, then another . . . and another. He always drank three cups, very weak. He would take a biscuit, but always left it half-eaten in his saucer. They talked. She asked him a question now and then. His work? And when would he be going to India again? (He had to go to India every year.) She mentioned the names of mutual friends and acquaintances, of relations. Had he made any more mountaineering expeditions? (He loved making mountaineering expeditions.) She heard the words he was saying. But she couldn't hold onto any of it, for all the time she was thinking: *she* is given everything and gives nothing in return.

The strength, the patience of the six elephants; the cool, the friendliness of the tree; the shade of its leaves; the enchanting azure blue of the turquoise flowers; the little jokes the monkeys were whispering in her one ear; the roo-còò-coo of the pair of turtledoves in the other; the adoration, the down-in-the-dust humility of the hideous little hunchback at her feet. And she has nothing to offer them, nothing to give them in return, since all she is capable of doing is to be herself, standing breathlessly still, her arms folded above her head—remote, inaccessible. . . .

Like him, she suddenly thought. Like him.

A silence had fallen. He looked in her direction. Had she failed to respond to some question he had asked?

"You're quieter than you used to be," he said. "I think you're much quieter than you used to be. What'll be the reason for that, I wonder?" And later: "You didn't waste much time entering into holy matrimony again, did you?"—there was just a hint of mockery in his tone—"Have you got a nice husband now? And you've children too, haven't you?" And still later: "Why are you in such a hurry to be getting back? Now you're here, you could easily have stayed a while. The guest room's ready." And: "If you'd come next year, you wouldn't have found me here, I'm leaving."

She stirred her tea and nodded 'yes' . . . and 'yes' again . . . and shook her head—'no'—once, and "Where are you going to?" she had asked.

"To India, or Australia; I think for good. I'm not sure yet."

But she didn't want to hear about him, she didn't want to hear about him leaving. She wanted to hear about the dancer and pointed to her. "Where did you find her? It isn't Javanese work, is it? In India? But where? At an antique dealer's? A junk shop?" In former days she'd always dreamed of coming across some priceless treasure in a junk shop.

He remembered this and burst out laughing.

"No, no, *not* in a junk shop! I found her in the treasure chamber of one of those little rajahs in the hills. I'd done him some small service. You could write a cheap novel about it! A noble rajah, a set of scoundrels, and a Wise Man in the background, a real Wise Man. A flight, a chase, adventures, danger, mortal danger, in fact—and the money it cost! A deuce of a lot of money"—it was one of his expressions—"and it took years and years before I'd got it safely here—it wasn't so long ago, as a matter of fact." And after a pause: "Not at all in my line, eh?"

"No, not at all in your line."

"Yet it was worth all the trouble, don't you think?"

"Oh, yes, I do," she said. "It was certainly worth all the trouble! But how long did you know of its existence?"

"D'you mean the dancer's?" he asked, his thoughts elsewhere. "I'm not sure. For years . . . we could work it out, if you really want to know. It wasn't the first time I was in India, nor the second. The third, yes, the third time, just before I came to Holland, the time we first met, the year before we got married. Work it out for yourself . . . we were married five years. . . ."

"Yes," she said, "and two and fourteen make sixteen. . . ."

He took over from her again: "Sixteen and five and one make twenty-two—why, it's a lifetime!"

"I am thirty-nine years old!" she suddenly heard herself saying, in a loud voice.

He looked at her, puzzled, as if not understanding why she had said that. Then, consolingly, "But that's not old; you've still a whole lifetime ahead of you."

After a while he added, "And it has a secret too—the Dancer can actually dance! If you were to stay, I could show you—why *don't* you stay? It's rather complicated, you see. There's a mechanism underneath, very primitive, full of spools and strings. You can set the whole thing in motion with that. The elephants stay where they are, but the disc with the tree on it turns around. The monkeys and the doves don't move themselves, they go around with the tree. The dancer turns in the other direction, gyrating on her toes, and all the turquoises on those chains swing around and tinkle a bit—I'd have loved to show you. It's all rather childish, of course. But you don't know how. . . ." He searched for a moment for a word. Then: "It's as though, as though it's alive. . . ."

"And the musician?" she asked. "Doesn't he get very tired of it all? Doesn't he stand up and play his guitar?"

He stared at her. "What makes you think that now? Why ever should you think that? No, the musician can't move."

She pushed back her sleeve from her wrist watch. "Oh, what a pity," she said, "but I shall have to be thinking of going. It's such a way to the station. I left a bag at the luggage office and that always takes such a time." And she stood up.

He had stood up too, and now, hesitantly, his brow puckered, he said, "Would you mind very much if I didn't come to the station with you? You know . . . goodbyes . . . you know how I hate saying goodbye to. . . ."

Had he wanted to say 'to you'? She looked at him for a moment. "Yes," she said, "Yes, I know."

But before they left the room, she walked across to the Copper Dancer again and stood in front of her. Those who are themselves and nothing but themselves stand alone somewhere, cold, remote. She made a small, violent gesture, an old one she learned as a child. She kissed the tip of her forefinger and, reaching up, pressed the spot her lips had touched on the dancer's head.

"What are you doing that for?" he asked, his voice strange and abrupt.

"Oh, nothing."

She put on her hat again without looking in a mirror, went on ahead of him out of the room, down the long, dark hall—on the one side their bedroom, her dressing room, on the other the dining room and the guest room . . . that was ready waiting for her . . . to the small front veranda, descended the steps and was standing in the garden.

"Have you kept the car waiting all this time?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

"But what was the point? Were you so afraid of missing your train?"

"I can't afford to miss it. It's the last there is today and my boat sails early tomorrow morning."

"Nonsense! There's always another boat, *and* another train. . . ." He seemed to be going to add something, but he mustn't do that. With a jerk she had suddenly become the woman of thirty-nine again, another man's wife, the mother of two delightful children—the elder one was already going to high school—and she had been to tea with someone she had not seen in sixteen years and whom next year she wouldn't even be able to trace any more.

She thrust her two hands straight out before her, toward him, and took his in her grasp, warmly and firmly in her grasp, and in a cheerful, friendly voice she was saying, "How nice to have seen each other again. I do hope everything works out splendidly for you, splendidly!" She was holding onto his hands tightly and couldn't release her grip. But she had, apparently, and she had not repeated "splendidly" a third time, but must have turned and stepped into the car, because now she found herself sitting inside it.

"Drive fast," she said to the native chauffeur. "Think of the train."

She forced herself to keep her face turned toward him—he had remained standing beside the car—she nodded, tried to laugh, to say something. She didn't hear what she said . . . and did he, perhaps, say something as well? Then she was turning and waving back again . . . she couldn't see if he were still standing there.

As they drove out of the garden and along the stretch of open road, she sat dead still, didn't move a muscle, scarcely drew a breath. Everyone who suffers pain as terrible as this has to sit still and not move and, if possible, avoid breathing.

Then they turned into the avenue, the old avenue that led to the town, with the canary trees—so high, so peaceful—that she had always loved so much in the old days. "Why are you driving so fast?" she said to the chauffeur. "Please drive slowly."

She sighed. The worst pain was over now. He'll be indoors again, standing in the rear veranda, close to the windows; the glint of the setting sun will be falling over the valley, the river, the boulders and the bamboo thickets. The mountain will be hidden in cloud.

He is standing close to the dancer—that's as it should be: he ought to be close to her, for in spirit they are one. They are each other—she he, he she—he is the Copper Dancer, under the tree with the blue flowers.

And, huddled in a corner in the back of her taxi, her hands clasped together, she said softly to herself, as though reciting the lines of a rhymeless little poem:

I am the six elephants
I am the two monkeys and the doves
I am the tree
I am the leaves and the turquoise flowers
I am the little hunchback on the ground.

—Translated from the Dutch by James Brockway

The Ring

by ISAK DINESEN

On a summer morning a hundred and fifty years ago a young Danish squire and his wife went out for a walk on their land. They had been married a week. It had not been easy for them to get married, for the wife's family was higher in rank and wealthier than the husband's. But the two young people, now twenty-four and nineteen years old, had been set on their purpose for ten years; in the end her haughty parents had had to give in to them.

They were wonderfully happy. The stolen meetings and secret, tearful love letters were now things of the past. To God and man they were one; they could walk arm in arm in broad daylight and drive in the same carriage, and they would walk and drive so till the end of their days. Their distant paradise had descended to earth and had proved, surprisingly, to be filled with the things of everyday life: with jesting and railleries, with breakfasts and suppers, with dogs, haymaking and sheep. Sigismund, the young husband, had promised himself that from now there should be no stone in his bride's path, nor should any shadow fall across it. Lovisa, the wife, felt that now, every day and for the first time in her young life, she moved and breathed in perfect freedom because she could never have any secret from her husband.

To Lovisa—whom her husband called Lise—the rustic atmosphere of her new life was a matter of wonder and delight. Her husband's fear that the existence he could offer her might not be good enough for her filled her heart with laughter. It was not a long time since she had played with dolls; as now she dressed her own hair, looked over her linen press and arranged her flowers she again lived through an enchanting and cherished experience: one was doing everything gravely and solicitously, and all the time one knew one was playing.

It was a lovely July morning. Little woolly clouds drifted high up in the sky, the air was full of sweet scents. Lise had on a white muslin frock and a large Italian straw hat. She and her husband took a path through the park; it wound on across the meadows, between small groves and groups of trees, to the sheep field. Sigismund was going to show his wife his sheep. For this reason she had not brought her small white dog, Bijou, with her, for he would yap at the lambs and frighten them, or he would annoy the sheep dogs. Sigismund prided himself on his sheep; he had studied sheep-breeding in Mecklenburg and England, and had brought back with him Cotswold rams by which to improve his Danish stock. While they walked he explained to Lise the great possibilities and difficulties of the plan.

She thought: 'How clever he is, what a lot of things he knows!' and at the same time: 'What an absurd person he is, with his sheep! What a baby he is! I am a hundred years older than he.'

But when they arrived at the sheepfold the old sheepmaster Mathias met them with the sad news that one of the English lambs was dead and two were sick. Lise saw that her husband was grieved by the tidings; while he questioned Mathias on the matter she kept silent and only gently pressed his arm. A couple of boys were sent off to fetch the sick lambs, the while master and servant went into the details of the case. It took some time.

Lise began to gaze about her and to think of other things. Twice her own thoughts made her blush deeply and happily, like a red rose, then slowly her blush died away, and the two men were still talking about sheep. A little while after their conversation caught her attention. It had turned to a sheep thief.

This thief during the last months had broken into the sheepfolds of the neighborhood like a wolf, had killed and dragged away his prey like a wolf and like a wolf had left no trace after him. Three nights ago the shepherd and his son on an estate ten miles away had caught him in the act. The thief had killed the man and knocked the boy senseless, and had managed to escape. There were men sent out to all sides to catch him, but nobody had seen him.

Lise wanted to hear more about the horrible event, and for her benefit old Mathias went through it once more.

There had been a long fight in the sheep house, in many places the earthen floor was soaked with blood. In the fight the thief's left arm was broken; all the same, he had climbed a tall fence with a lamb on his back. Mathias added that he would like to string up the murderer with these two hands of his, and Lise nodded her head at him gravely in approval. She remembered Red Ridinghood's wolf, and felt a pleasant little thrill running down her spine.

Sigismund had his own lambs in his mind, but he was too happy in himself to wish anything in the universe ill. After a minute he said, "Poor devil."

Lise said, "How can you pity such a terrible man? Indeed Grandmamma was right when she said that you were a revolutionary and a danger to society!" The thought of Grandmamma, and of the tears of past days, again turned her mind away from the gruesome tale she had just heard.

The boys brought the sick lambs and the men began to examine them carefully, lifting them up and trying to get them on their legs; they squeezed them here and there and made the little creatures whimper. Lise shrank from the show and her husband noticed her distress.

"You go home, my darling," he said, "this will take some time. But just walk ahead slowly, and I shall catch up with you."

So she was turned away by an impatient husband to whom his sheep meant more than his wife. If any experience could be sweeter than to be dragged out by him to look at those same sheep, it would be this. She dropped her large summer hat with its blue ribbons on the grass and told him to carry it back for her, for she wanted to feel the summer air on her forehead and in her hair. She walked on very slowly, as he had told her to do, for she wished to obey him in everything. As she walked she felt a great new happiness in being altogether alone, even without Bijou. She could not remember that she had ever before in all her life been altogether alone. The landscape around her was still, as if full of promise, and it was hers. Even the swallows cruising in the air were hers, for they belonged to him, and he was hers.

She followed the curving edge of the grove and after a minute or two found that she was out of sight to the men by the sheep house. What could now, she wondered, be sweeter than to walk along the path in the long flowering meadow grass, slowly, slowly, and to let her husband overtake her there? It would be sweeter still, she reflected, to steal into the grove and to be gone, to have vanished from the surface of the earth from him when, tired of the sheep and longing for her company, he should turn the bend of the path to catch up with her.

An idea struck her; she stood still to think it over.

A few days ago her husband had gone for a ride and she had not wanted to go with him, but had strolled about with Bijou in order to explore her domain. Bijou then, gamboling, had led her straight into the grove. As she had followed him, gently forcing her way into the shrubbery, she had suddenly come upon a glade in the midst of it, a narrow space like a small alcove with hangings of thick green and golden brocade, big enough to hold two or three people in it. She had felt at that moment that she had come into the very heart of her new home. If today she could find the spot again she would stand perfectly still there, hidden from all the world. Sigismund would look for her in all directions, he would be unable to understand what had become of her and for a minute, for a short minute—or, perhaps, if she were firm and cruel enough, for five—he would realize what a void, what an unendurably sad and horrible place the universe would be when she was no longer in it. She gravely scrutinized the grove to find the right entrance to her hiding-place, then went in.

She took great care to make no noise at all, therefore advanced exceedingly slowly. When a twig caught the flounces of her ample skirt she loosened it softly from the muslin, so as not to crack it. Once a branch took hold of one of her long golden curls; she stood still, with her arms lifted, to free it. A little way into the grove the soil became moist; her light steps no longer made any sound upon it. With one hand she held her small handkerchief to her lips, as if to emphasize the secretness of her course. She found the spot she sought and bent down to divide the foliage and make a door to her sylvan closet. At this the hem of her dress caught her foot and she stopped to loosen it. As she rose she looked into the face of a man who was already in the shelter.

He stood up erect, two steps off. He must have watched her as she made her way straight toward him.

She took him in in one single glance. His face was bruised and scratched, his hands and wrists stained with dark filth. He was dressed in rags, barefooted, with tatters wound round his naked ankles. His arms hung down to his sides, his right hand clasped the hilt of a knife. He was about her own age. The man and the woman looked at each other.

This meeting in the wood from beginning to end passed without a word; what happened could only be rendered by pantomime. To the two actors in the pantomime it was timeless, according to a clock it lasted four minutes.

She had never in her life been exposed to danger. It did not occur to her to sum up her position, or to work out the length of time it would take to call her husband or Mathias, whom at this moment she could hear shouting to his dogs. She beheld the man before her as she would have beheld a forest ghost; the apparition itself, not the sequels of it, changes the world to the human who faces it.

Although she did not take her eyes off the face before her she sensed that the alcove had been turned into a covert. On the ground a couple of sacks formed a couch, there were some gnawed bones by it. A fire must have been made here in the night, for there were cinders strewn on the forest floor.

After a while she realized that he was taking her in as she had taken in him. He was no longer just run to earth and crouching for a spring, but he was wondering, trying to know. At that she seemed to see herself with the eyes of the wild animal at bay in his dark hiding-place: her silently approaching white figure, which might mean death.

He moved his right arm till it hung down straight before him between his legs. Without lifting the hand he bent the wrist and slowly raised the point of the knife till it pointed at her throat. The gesture was mad, unbelievable. He did not smile as he made it, but his nostrils distended, the corners of his mouth quivered a little. Then slowly he put the knife back in the sheath by his belt.

She had no object of value about her, only the wedding ring which her husband had set on her finger in church, a week ago. She drew it off, and in this movement dropped her handkerchief. She reached out her hand with the ring toward him. She did not bargain for her life. She was fearless by nature, and the horror with which he inspired her was not fear of what he might do to her. She commanded him, she besought him to vanish as he had come, to take a dreadful figure out of her life, so that it should never have been there. In the dumb movement her young form had the grave authoritativeness of a priestess conjuring down some monstrous being by a sacred sign.

He slowly reached out his hand to hers, his finger touched hers, and her hand was steady at the touch. But he did not take the ring. As she let it go it dropped to the ground as her handkerchief had done.

For a second the eyes of both followed it. It rolled a few inches toward him and stopped before his bare foot. In a hardly perceivable movement he kicked it away and again looked into her face. They remained like that, she knew not how long, but she felt that during that time something happened, things were changed.

He bent down and picked up her handkerchief. All the time gazing at her; he again drew his knife and wrapped the tiny bit of cambric round the blade. This was difficult for him to do because his left arm was broken. While he did it his face under the dirt and suntan slowly grew whiter till it was almost phosphorescent. Fumbling with both hands, he once more stuck the knife into the sheath. Either the sheath was too big and had never fitted the knife, or the blade was much worn—it went in. For two or three more seconds his gaze rested on her face; then he lifted his own face a little, the strange radiance still upon it, and closed his eyes.

The movement was definitive and unconditional. In this one motion he did what she had begged him to do: he vanished and was gone. She was free.

She took a step backward, the immovable, blind face before her, then bent as she had done to enter the hiding-place, and glided away as noiselessly as she had come. Once outside the grove she stood still and looked round for the meadow path, found it and began to walk home.

Her husband had not yet rounded the edge of the grove. Now he saw her and helloed to her gaily; he came up quickly and joined her.

The path here was so narrow that he kept half behind her and did not touch her. He began to explain to her what had been the matter with the lambs. She walked a step before him and thought: All is over.

After a while he noticed her silence, came up beside her to look at her face and asked, "What is the matter?"

She searched her mind for something to say, and at last said, "I have lost my ring."

"What ring?" he asked her.

She answered, "My wedding ring."

As she heard her own voice pronounce the words she conceived their meaning.

Her wedding ring. "With this ring"—dropped by one and kicked away by another—"with this ring I thee wed." With this lost ring she had wedded herself to something. To what? To poverty, persecution, total loneliness. To the sorrows and the sinfulness of this earth. "And what therefore God has joined together let man not put asunder."

"I will find you another ring," her husband said. "You and I are the same as we were on our wedding day; it will do as well. We are husband and wife today too, as much as yesterday, I suppose."

Her face was so still that he did not know if she had heard what he said. It touched him that she should take the loss of his ring so to heart. He took her hand and kissed it. It was cold, not quite the same hand as he had last kissed. He stopped to make her stop with him.

"Do you remember where you had the ring on last?" he asked.

"No," she answered.

"Have you any idea," he asked, "where you may have lost it?"

"No," she answered. "I have no idea at all."

Guardian

by MAURICE DUGGAN

In monkish black, slippered for the night, Brother Ignatius trod slowly through the dormitory's gloom, in the false silence of stirring beds, past the false sleepers, his rosary-beads trembling as he gathered bead by bead the familiar prayers, his footfalls patting forward over the floor. Under the dim lights the white beds lay, a phalanx of graves, each white locker a precise headstone. At the trough of the washstand a tap dripped. As he had done now so often that he was not conscious of his movement, he walked over and screwed it down. The drips stopped and then began again, slower, knocking behind him as he walked away, telling the ebony beads, murmuring:

Hail Mary full of Grace
The Lord is with thee.

And the old wooden two-story building shook as an airplane flew over in the dark; flying low.

He trod the outward aisle, walking before the bed-ends and the windows, and turned inwards under the white crucifix, Christ in luminous agony, and the clock, the green shining hands brushing over the minutes. The luminous clock-hands were brighter than the phosphorescence of that spread-eagled figure. Brother Ignatius' portly body ached for sleep.

He walked and prayed as he had done so many nights, and the great room sheltered them all, the watchers and the walker and the marshaled beds; and the symbols, Christ and the clock, looked on. The rosary-beads went one by one through his fingers; each smooth bead was a prayer whether he prayed or not. The mild slow turning of his thoughts was, too, a prayer. He had walked, he had watched so long. Nothing changed. The boys wore different faces, carried different names, but bedded in this pale light those who watched him now, waiting for him to go, were how little different from those who had watched his vigil's beginning, thirty years ago. He wondered, as he often did, how long he must wait for a successor; how long he must wait to be relieved of this duty that he might return to that solitude that was all comfort: a solitude in which he could not and would not need to pray. He wondered, and yet he knew, precisely, to the day. He turned again, walking at an unvaried pace. A boy stirred, coughed, and another cried out in real or pretended sleep.

After thirty years they could not surprise him: but they could perplex him. Animosity and affection seemed in them to lie so close that it was perhaps the merest accident which feeling most strongly survived. How rebuke and why suspect them? What would it serve to go, like Brother Mark, creeping through the dormitory with a torch—illuminating only his own suspicion? For Brother Ignatius, fingering the last few beads, suspicion deserved only suspicion: what he didn't know couldn't hurt them. And yet what virtue could he pretend to in his own method which was no method at all but only laxity, uncertainty, a sort of benign indifference. But he wouldn't, he thought, know how to make it other than it was. How could it be otherwise? When he saw them, callow boys, naked under the showers, woken reluctant—guiltless if not innocent—from sleep, woken into the admonitions of yet another day from which they must snatch, against all prohibition, such pleasure as they could, there was no rebuke they might deserve. What should he suspect them of? The deeds of dark were, for Brother Ignatius, such small deeds; a stirring only of life and unpracticed lust.

He walked toward his cubicle and turned the main switch, leaving the dormitory to darkness. Only the gap of light over the top of the partition in his own quarters shone out.

Looking back before he entered, he thought the beds seemed whiter: too pale to do more than stir the dark, the moonlight shone through the windows. The tolling beads hanging at his hand chattered as he pushed aside the curtains and entered his cubicle.

He kissed, briefly, again almost in habit, the crucifix at the end of the chained beads and dropped the rosary on to his table. He wound the clock not bothering to set the alarm; the six-o'clock bell would find him already awake. He undid his starched white bib, examining it for a moment, wondering whether it would do another day. He laid it beside the rosary. Without undressing further he switched off the light and went to the window.

Two stories below, the quadrangle lay empty and dark, enclosed on three sides. He looked toward the main house where a row of windows which he knew to be the chapel were lit still, and out over the playgrounds to where, in invitation to the rugged game, the white goal posts stood. And while he watched, the chapel lights went out and only the moon shone now, pale in the silence.

He turned away and knelt at his bed. He had knelt like this, at one bed or another, since his childhood, without losing the feeling that he was doing something ridiculous, something of which he would have been ashamed had he been discovered; the attitude was of his childhood. Now he thought only of how little dignity it must have; an old man praying in a habit of piety, without his collar. After sixty years, or more, there should have been more residue than this, something more in his mind than the feelings of his youth come to torment his age; there should have been more of wisdom and of faith.

He knelt there, feeling cold and, surprisingly, hungry, and the shiftings he heard behind the thin partition began as they always did, to intimidate him. He coughed and pressed his fingers over his closed eyes.

That morning he had sought an interview with the Brother Superior and he had forgotten, had put aside considering the outcome of it until now. He had been foolish, he thought, to plead his tiredness and his age. He had felt one of those impulses of pity for himself which he knew were of too regular an occurrence. He had yielded to it—a sin that, too—and the Brother Superior had thought he was giving in: that had found expression in the Brother Superior's long stare.

"I'm sorry to hear it," the Brother Superior said. "But are you sure that it's anything serious? Doctor Sullivan can give you a checkup. I mean a tonic or something like that might help. Or even prayers," he added slyly.

"Yes Brother," was all he had found to say.

"Don't think I am unsympathetic," the Brother Superior said. "For I'm not. I think you know that. We are all dispirited at times. I am, after all, an older man than you, and I know something about it, I think. I haven't always been in this position: but you know that, too. There's no trouble in your dormitory, is there?"

Brother Ignatius gave him a stare in return. What had he heard? Under the great shelf of his brows the eyes of the Brother Superior looked out like shrewd moles; shrewdly keeping their secrets. Brother Ignatius couldn't make him out. Had he heard something that he was determined not to reveal? But then, what could that be? There was nothing: nothing.

"Boys are willful, Brother Ignatius; we have both had enough experience not to be surprised at that. What can be done through discipline we must do. They are no more, I sometimes think, than a set of impulses, and it is our duty to check some of those impulses and to encourage others. And they outnumber us. We shall never perfectly succeed; even to hope that would be perhaps the sin of pride. You see what a burden that puts upon us as the guardians of their welfare?"

As strangers meeting, the elegant hands of the Brother Superior bowed to one another, touched coldly, fell away. An air of trite reminiscence shone gently in his face.

"Time doesn't make any great changes in some ways, Brother Ignatius. When I was younger I used often to think that they would always know more than we did, those boys. They are so quick, don't you find? So determined to outwit us. And they leave us before our work is more than begun, and I wonder still how quickly it is all undone; how much we can hope to do about shoring up the good in them. But there, all this doesn't help you much. If you are sure you aren't worried by anything, then we must have Doctor Sullivan take a look at you."

It was as easy as that, Brother Ignatius thought, still kneeling at his bed. And perhaps the Brother Superior was right: perhaps it really was. Nevertheless he might have been, for all the wisdom expected of him, any pupil come for rebuke or guidance, and if they took away no more than he had taken away, a sense of his own disgrace, his own inadequacy, then they too were but little helped. What had any of those careful phrases to do with what he felt now as the cold of the floor struck into his knees—conscious of a burden he had borne in silence and too long without ever knowing what it was. Drowsily, unconscious that he was making any sound, he composed aloud the answer that he might have made. Anyone overhearing him would have thought that he prayed.

"He might have known that I didn't agree. He must have known. I've tried often enough, God knows, to get something done about these barracks, about so many things, even that tap. They aren't in the army; it's no crime, surely, to be a young boy? They'll meet that soon enough outside. I've said that often enough, too, and to their parents. That's where they ought to be; at home. What can we do for them who don't even know the world we are supposed to be fitting them for? Our sort of discipline won't work because it hasn't enough love in it. But I've neglected to say that. They ought to be with their families: family love or family hate, it's better perhaps than this. If our salvation is in what we do for them, then what we make of them is something else."

It was absurd: he had almost droned himself to sleep in the soft mooning light. He shook himself awake, wagging his head as though violently saying no to some question only he was aware of. He rose heavily from his knees, pushing himself slowly upright with his hands, and began to prepare himself for bed. His pajama coat was too tight to button and lay open on his chest, revealing the few sparse old man's hairs. He could hear voices from the dormitory. He listened for a moment and climbed into his bed. He was tired: he stared at the sliver of moon that rose in his window, remembering a jingle about not seeing the new moon through glass, and turned on his side. He lay with his face to the flowers of damp on the plaster wall, turning his deaf ear alone to the urgency, the secrecy, the quick hissing whispers of the dormitory of which he was guardian.

He was framing another answer in his mind when he fell abruptly into sleep and began quite loudly to snore. Believing him for some purpose to be feigning, the dormitory was quiet.

The Dormouse Child

by A. E. ELLIS

Who am I? What am I? I do not know. In the morning I am the dormouse child, very small, pink-nosed and wearing the dressing gown Mom made me out of a fawn-colored blanket. As I do my hair in front of the mirror I wink quickly at myself to show that I am not taken in by my reflection. Half-an-hour later I am a schoolboy with short trousers, gray shirt and striped knitted tie. It is just another disguise. As I walk to school I become some of my real selves. Sometimes I am good like leading an army of liberation to a beleaguered city. Sometimes I am bad like spying for another country which wants our atom secrets which I know because of being a famous scientist. Sometimes I am someone who does certain things. And I cannot speak of what these things are.

When I reach the school I again put on my boy disguise. All the other boys too are in disguise but some of them less than others. The one who is least in disguise is Smithson.

Smithson is smaller than me but very tough and I am frightened of him. He comes up to me and he takes my arm and he twists it behind my back and he goes on twisting it till I scream out and the tears trickle down my cheeks and worst of all I know that if he twists it just one bit more my arm will break right off and will remain in his hand and I will have only a bit of stump which I will show to the masters and the parents of Smithson and my parents, and I will wake up each morning the dormouse child with only three paws.

"Be my slave," he says.

"I won't. Oh! Oh! Yes, I will."

"Then get down on your knees you dirty little coward."

With Smithson twisting my arm behind my back I drop down to my knees on the gravel surface of the playground, the stones and bits of flint cutting into my knees. The bell rings. Smithson lets go my wrist and my arm drops to my side. It feels as if it was just about to come off, all limp and strange and I can hardly move it. All the boys tumbling and shouting and pushing at me as we go into the schoolhouse. They just don't know what I can do. They don't know that if I wanted I could press a button on the wall and they would all drop dead from electric shocks. They don't know that during prayers I could make a sign and the headmaster would drop through the rostrum and never be seen again. They don't know what I have done on Winthrop Common. Most especially they don't know what I have done on Winthrop Common.

It is on Winthrop Common that I have done the things I cannot speak of. And the person I have done them to is Smithson. It is late at night and I am in bed. I get up and I just put my blazer over my pajamas and I hurry across the common to where Smithson lives and I knock at the door though it is very late. Mrs. Smithson opens the door.

"Mrs. Smithson," I say, "can I please see your little boy at once. It is very urgent."

"But he's in bed," she says. And sometimes she gets very cross, saying: "And how dare you come round here at this time of night waking us up and getting us out of bed. And just wearing your pajamas and a blazer and all."

"But it's really very important," I say, and I put on my innocent dormouse look which fools everyone in the world and which no one can resist.

"All right," she says. "But don't be long. You can't stay more than five minutes."

I go straight up to Smithson's room. He is still asleep and I wake him by shaking his shoulder.

"What is it? What do you want?" He is very drowsy.

"There is no time to lose," I tell him. "I have just found a dozen caskets of jewels and doubloons. They are buried on Winthrop Common under Dead Man's Beech. You pretend to go to sleep and when your mom has gotten back to bed you sneak out and come to behind the woodshed and I'll lead you to the hiding place. I'll give you a third of all we can carry away."

Sometimes he argues and says he wants half. Other times he's quite glad to settle for one-third. Then he lies down and pretends to sleep. I go downstairs where Mrs. Smithson is waiting in the hall.

"So sorry to have troubled you, Mrs. Smithson," I say, and if I am wearing my cap I raise it very politely. And I add again: "So very sorry indeed."

Sometimes she is in a good mood and she says: "That's all right. Won't you have something to drink before you go." But mostly she is sullen and sleepy. Once Mr. Smithson is waiting for me with a stick and I have to freeze him with a secret sign whilst his stick is raised above his head. Then I click my fingers and the room grows very hot and he begins to melt. Mrs. Smithson runs all the way down the path after me begging me to give her back her husband but I just point to where Mr. Smithson is oozing out under the door and I give one of my frightful laughs which make people turn all goose flesh.

Then Smithson sneaks out of bed and comes to meet me at the back of the woodshed. The end is so near that I am in no hurry. Maybe I give him a cigarette and ask him how he will spend his part of the treasure.

"I'll buy a jet airplane and a radar apparatus and a submarine and a skin-diving outfit." (That's the sort of kid he is. He just never grows up. When he talks like that I don't see why I should have any remorse for what I am going to do.)

"Well, where is all the treasure you're always talking of?" he asks suddenly.

"I told you. It's under Dead Man's Beech."

"But boy, it's spooky there. There's spooks from miles around."

"I'll be with you and I'm not afraid of any old spook," I say.

We set off across the heather and the gorse and Smithson is mighty jumpy. Every shadow, every noise of a twig breaking and he jumps clear off the ground. Boy, do I laugh to myself. Sometimes I deliberately frighten him. I say:

"Wait while I go behind this tree and light a cigarette."

Then I go behind the tree and I make dreadful spooky noises and Smithson howls and calls for his mom and flops down on the ground and covers his eyes with his hands. I watch him till I double up. Then I say: "C'mon Smithson. It was just a joke. It was me all the time."

Dead Man's Beech. It is the biggest tree in the world.

No one has ever climbed to the top for it pokes right up through the clouds and disappears from sight. Once it was the mast of a great pirate ship and the captain went down on his knees to God in the middle of a terrible storm and swore that if ever he got home safe he would plant the mast in the middle of Winthrop Common. And God heard his voice and the waters were immediately stilled. And the captain did what he had promised and the mast grew into a great beech tree, the biggest in the whole world. And once a year all the seamen and prisoners which were hanged from the mast come back and go gibbering and howling round and round it and anyone who sees it goes mad or is struck down dead.

"Here we are, Smithson," I say.

"Where's the treasure?"

"Not so fast. Take it easy."

"Gee, I'm scared. I wish I'd never come."

"Why not go home if you're scared?" I take out a cigarette and I light it in a way which shows that whatever he does I couldn't care less.

"But you said we'd come to get the treasure."

"I did." Nonchalantly I blow twin smoke rings out through my nose.

Although Smithson is so scared he starts to get tough. "I've got more to do than hang around here all night. Besides I've got to get to school in the morning."

"You've got to get to school in the morning!" And I give my creepy goose-flesh laugh.

"Why are you laughing?"

"Because you are very funny."

"You think so." He comes toward me and he has his mean look on his face. "You laugh just once more like that and I will twist your arm right out of its socket."

"Come and get it," I say. And I take my hand from behind my back. He gives an awful shriek (it frightens me sometimes) for he sees that where the hand should be there is a great steel claw. Then I draw up my sleeve and he sees that the steel claw is at the end of a steel strut. Then I tear off my blazer and pajama jacket and he sees that I am all made of steel. He gives another shriek and turns to run but I throw out my claw and catch him. He drops down to the ground in a dead faint.

And it is now that I do terrible things to Smithson, and they are so terrible that the sweat starts off my forehead and they are the things I cannot tell of. And even if I live to be as old and as tall as Dead Man's Beech I will never be able to forget these things which are so terrible and which are a secret inside me and which no one knows. Maybe if I could tell what they are I would be released from ever having to do them any more, but how can I ever tell things which are so terrible? And that is how it is they stay locked way up inside me and only I have the key and only I know I have the key. And sometimes it is that I am with my mom and I think of them and my mom says: "What is the matter? What are you thinking of?" And I cannot reply. And once at such a moment my pop hit me and I just lay on the ground and I could not move because I was still thinking of the things which I did to Smithson. And I think of them in church when everyone thinks I am praying. And I think of them in form when the masters are getting mad at me because they see I am not listening. And these things are my life and they will live with me long after I have ceased to be the dormouse child. And never will I be able to tell anyone what they are.

Les chasses d'Ethiopie

by PIERRE GASCAR

Wakened before daybreak, in the darkness of my room, I used to hear the dogs howling at the hyenas that prowled the steep hillside, trying to come close to the village. I used to imagine them, still quite far off, silhouetted against the slope in the blue night light, silently advancing, then retreating, brusquely absorbed by shadows, while the dogs grew dizzy with barking, in the savage fraternity of beasts. Everything seemed enormous: the night, and the countryside, opening onto those expanses of moonlight and hyenas.

Sometimes I could hear the light, barefoot step of black men who smelled of musk. They wore *chamas,* that length of white cloth Ethiopians wrap round their naked bodies, which gives them the air of mummies suddenly called back to the world, getting on as best they can in their winding sheets. They passed close to the house, surrounded by barking, walking toward the hills swiftly and furtively, as if taking advantage of our sleep to cross this territory ordinarily closed to them, to which night gave them the keys.

Then morning came back with its rough rutted roads which one pulled toward oneself like an interminable anchor chain. At that hour before the great heat bore down too heavily, when the air was clearer, and the jagged, bluish horizon seemed nearer, when one was encouraged, invited, to movement and liberty, one rediscovered the countryside, tortuous and barricaded, in which each step seemed weighted and chained, as in a dream.

There was, to begin with, the soil, as stony and deeply cut as glacial moraine. There were the grasses, long and pale, sometimes lying like swathes, or like rushes after a flood, sometimes standing upright, moving their meager heads in a faint rustling with which was mingled the buzzing of flies—dry, burning and agitated like tiny spears of black grass. There were thickets of dead pines, bleached white by drought, and long stretches of feather-leafed dwarf trees, closely growing one against another; a thousand subtle prohibitions which appeared only in due course and created a kind of discouragement for which one reproached oneself, as for a lack of ardor.

We would have given in to our lassitude gladly, and turned back, if, each morning when we were already far from the village, beginning to slow our pace and to feel our chains, there had not been a mass awakening of birds. I have never known such an abundance of species and variety of color. There were African bustards, with yellow beaks and feet, black crowns and wing-tips fringed with white. There were rhaads, another kind of bustard, smaller, livelier, crested and more brilliantly colored; francolins, with orange necklaces; *tétras*, which are large grouse; partridges, with red spots under their throats; blue pigeons, and still others. . . .

I didn't begin to know what they all were called, and often confused them in their swift flights under the heavy foliage. One would catch in the shadows only a streak of color which one couldn't place on the bird's body, summarized in a quick flash which accompanied the agitation of the air, in turn barely perceptible, like the wind in the grass.

And so it was, on those still mornings, that my companions began to fire, shooting at the birds who disguised themselves as they flew. Endless volleys shook the silence. It ceased to be a hunt and became an assault on the morning, blows struck against its closed doors, frantic efforts to penetrate its barricades of stones and pines and arrive at a world where, to begin with, birds had names.

We always finished by forcing our way in. Looking for the creatures we had killed, we no longer felt the restraining pull of grass and brush, the snares set for us by the land. We grew jolly, talked loudly, shouted to each other, while the sound of firing reverberated with an air, somehow, of joyous release, through the soft, discouraging mornings of hypocrite Ethiopia. I didn't like hunting, and never shot, myself. I discovered, however, that it held a key: the death of beasts.

The Greek innkeeper often acted as our guide. He was a man of fifty, menaced by death from angina pectoris. He rarely spoke, resembling in this most of his compatriots who lived in Ethiopia, in the boredom of isolated villages and the irritation of flies. And perhaps, too, he owed his habits of silence to hunting, for he excelled in this occupation. He knew all its seasons, and watched throughout the year, one after another, its procession of hairy harvests. Yes, harvests. On some days he killed as many as six boars, which his black servants would carry to the house. It made me think of laying up the season's produce in barns. Dead, a boar is no more than a shapeless vegetable mass covered with long bristles, gray and lusterless, matted with earth and blood.

I wondered why the Greek innkeeper killed so many. His family certainly couldn't eat them all, and the Ethiopians, servants and neighbors, despised this flesh, which is held to be pork by the Coptic religion and is forbidden. The dogs were allowed to gorge, and the rest was buried. The next day, the innkeeper returned to the hunt, silent, a cigarette between his lips, his face still drawn from a recent attack of angina, a man who carried death in his heart.

A day had not passed since we came to the village that he had not offered to take us hunting. He was urgent, and we allowed him to persuade us, but we could not see that his illness was getting worse. His wife, anxious and hostile, watched him leave. She was thin, wore black and held herself stiffly erect. Her dignity and self-possession seemed a kind of mourning.

The presence of the couple's only child, a young girl of eighteen with a somber, chiseled beauty, did not lighten the atmosphere of the house. Held by her parents in frightened subjection, Maria repressed the vitality of her age. She would have talked and laughed with us gladly had we been there during her free time, but hunting kept us away too often.

She reproached us for this, sometimes even shouting, when her father wasn't there, deploring that in his state of health he should expose himself to these arduous marches through the forest, blaming us for being accomplices to his passion. But since he would have indulged this passion whether or not he had company, I understood that this complaint was only a cover for the displeasure we caused by our absence.

Perhaps too, she felt sympathy for our victims, the brilliantly colored birds whose blood mingled with their feathers, as they lay with dangling heads on the edge of the table where we put them each evening when we came in. Like her mother, she looked at us each morning as we left with a kind of mute anger. I thought that since I carried no gun I might escape her censure. Then I thought that, to the contrary, she would probably see in the apparent gratuity of my participation a cruel curiosity. On the edge of the hunt and the cold pleasure of those who fired, was I not abandoning myself to a chase even more subtle, amorous and perfidious, which consisted of watching at length and describing the creatures who would die?

The Greek innkeeper took us to the forest where wild boar could be found. The jeep followed a deeply rutted road. Golden foxes, gazelles and, always, hyenas fled through the bordering thickets. The animals pushed through the undergrowth toward those inaccessible places where, parceled out as in a zoo, but animated with the constant agitation of animal liberty, there waited other gazelles, kudus, antelopes, monkeys and those invisible leopards who inhabited this country.

I liked to surprise these creatures and watch them take flight, with a fright so sudden it seemed to hang for an instant, suspended, as if painted against the thick growth of trembling leaves. The Greek innkeeper told us that a little earlier in the year a migration for which no one knew the reason had assembled several hundred gazelles. Their tightly grouped herd had moved through the brakes, crossed plateaus and valleys, with a steady regular progress. The creatures moved flank to flank, as if blinded by a dream. The innkeeper came right up to them and touched one with his hand. The animal didn't feel his touch; none of them even saw him. The rivers of gazelles washed gently against him, in an odor of dust and musk. He didn't fire.

Now as he described the scene, he held his hand out before him: there, like water, a river of gazelles, breaking up further on, in the desert, in a great delta of silence. The world became once more a world of solitude and watchfulness.

The hunters opened the way for me, and I followed them across the gray forests. Those trees must never lose their leaves: the earth underneath them is bare and ashy between the trunks. The sun was hidden, the air still. I walked without sound, crumbling a leaf between my fingers. A boar ran out ahead of us. The Greek innkeeper fired, and the bullet raised a cloud of dust between the animal's legs. The creature staggered a few yards ahead of us, and then continued its course, one of its hind legs dangling. Suddenly it was evening.

We walked for hours through the still forest, and then moved into another forest. Each time we came to the edge of the trees, I imagined there would be strong light and willow herb running down to the sea; but it was always a tufted, iron-gray valley separating us from the next forest. We crossed the valley, and unseen creatures fled into the thickness of the leaves.

One evening we wounded a boar, mortally. The bullet had just missed immediate death. While we waited for the end, the Greek innkeeper went back to get the truck for the carcass. It was already dark. A man whose face was no longer visible and I were left alone. The boar, withdrawn to a thicket, was indistinguishable from shadow. Almost twice the size of European boar, his breath whistled noisily. We watched his resting place from a distance. In a sudden surge of life, he might attack us. Nevertheless, we had to be there. His final flight couldn't take him far, but far enough to lose him, if he tried it in our absence. The Greek innkeeper was slow in returning, and the boar drew out his struggle for life. When his breathing finally stopped, the silence was even worse; his agony had been company for us. I went up to the thicket and lit a match. The beast's eyes were wide open, and he lay as he had been, ready to spring. His groin pressed against the earth, his neck bent under the weight of his head, he was less the image of death than of utter defeat.

The match burned itself out, and the night sent us back to our solitude. I thought I heard something scraping against the stones, and imagined scorpions, which the evening coolness brings out from under the stones. At last the truck came. We put the boar in the back, and I sat beside it, my feet resting on the carcass, which filled the entire space. The spasmodic jerking of the truck communicated itself to that mass of still-warm flesh, and it seemed the animal was reviving. The night grew darker, and we could no longer distinguish the trees against the sky. A little later, close to the inn, we could see the glimmer of native fires. We pulled out the carcass and put it in a shed, which we locked because of hyenas. It was time to sleep. On the road, Ethiopians wrapped in their white *chamas* passed by, barefoot, silent, and vanished into the night. They never even looked at us. I wondered: what was happening in this country?

Sometimes I cursed it. Its somnolent indigence and filth, its feudal customs irritated me. But above all, its innocence. The tranquillity of the mornings, their transparent clarity, their flights of birds created a kind of well-being from which we were excluded, but whose mark the Ethiopians carried with their air of secrecy and mute pride. It was the first time I had seen our civilization identified with a demerit; and the silence of the country, its subtle rigors, constantly reminded us of it.

The Greek innkeeper appeared every morning, his face paler and more drawn. His left arm was stiffening, but he spoke of even more distant excursions. He knew the surroundings of the village too well, and suggested hunts which forced us to rise in darkness and drive for hours through a landscape of black mountains.

We crossed the Aouache and penetrated the territory of the Gallas, in the direction of Harrar. We already knew these people, as our village marked the boundary of their district, and we feared them. Quite recently foreign travelers and Amharic Ethiopians had been emasculated. These criminal attacks were not expressive of vengeance. The Gallas were only looking for virile trophies with which to bedeck themselves and assure their prestige in the eyes of their women. We were not enemies, but prey. We suppressed our fears: this menace was degrading. We were desired in a manner so precise and explicit that our masculinity became identified with a kind of gross virginity.

Our anxiety, and the silence of this district, less wooded and emptier, and the pallor of the earth and of the plants which grew in this light, as crude and neutral as in a premonition, made us feel we were living in a dream.

There was a large brackish lake surrounded by a wide sterile zone which was flooded at certain seasons of the year and bleached white with mineral salts. Near the shore, the water which the clayey soil could not absorb filled any impression and after a few minutes coated the surface with a transparent jelly-like skin.

Pawprints were pressed into this white mud, crisscrossed and superimposed, as if a hundred different creatures, friends or enemies, had trodden the same spot at the same moment: birds, cheetahs, hyenas, intermingled, united by night thirst, drawn by these waters full of nitrate, gleaming and dead under the moon.

Flights of flamingos swooped down into the unbearable glitter of the lake unruffled by any breeze, from which an occasional fish leapt and fell back, carving slow waves of mercury.

Close by was a smaller lake of sweet water, surrounded by trees and grasses of a somber, violent green, against the white of the neighboring shore: a kind of stagnant oasis. It was inhabited by crocodiles, who slid back into the water at our approach. We hid, and soon their heads flowered against the surface. My companions fired. The crocodile disappeared, his eyes gaping wide, to die at the bottom of the lake, from which his body would rise after four days with its ringed tail and pale waxen stomach.

The hunters played this game on evenings after too rich a harvest had left them surfeited with the sickly sweet exhaustion of pleasure. They derived a certain glory from these exploits, which they described to Maria. She watched us fixedly, but her eyes turned most often to an Englishman in our group. Did she love him? But she had already gone into the next room, and we fell back into silence. My companions had not explained that they fired on the crocodiles, on those gluey bubbles breathed up from the bottom when the shower of buckshot creased the black water of the lake, because it was essential to fire, to shake that insistent silence, to wake oneself from that dream where water froze in heat, where the beasts of creation, jostling in the fraternity of night, among them the hyenas with dogs' prints, came to drink at this lake, bitter and pale like cold lye, where in a depth of water darkened by rotting leaves crocodiles pushed to the surface with their blank, pupilless eyes. . . . It was essential to fire without stopping, to pound and crash against those doors. . . .

On our return journeys we often stopped at an isolated plantation owned by some Greeks. An avenue of papayas led up to the house.

One evening one of the planters asked the innkeeper: "Do you have plenty of cartridges?"

The innkeeper answered that he had a substantial reserve. The capital was a day's journey and its stores were often badly supplied. He had long ago taken his precautions. The planters were delighted: they needed munitions. Bands of *chiftas*—highwaymen along the main roads of Ethiopia—were roaming the district. They might find allies among the native workers the planters employed, who were dissatisfied with their lot. Thus, attacks with intent to rob might easily turn into an uprising.

The planters managed to infect us with their fears. We scrutinized the shadows on our homeward journeys. One evening in the middle of the road we found a bottle filled with a white liquid propped up as a support for a board which was lying on the ground. Some letters had been scrawled across it with black paint, not Amharic, but Latin characters: *Ambo.* This word had no meaning in any of the languages we knew. The place was absolutely deserted. Who had left this curious message, and to whom was it addressed? Mares dashed across the road in the glare of our headlamps. My companions fired at them at random, with frantic excess. It was the only way of answering that obscure message found by chance on the road. Its strangeness troubled us: not so much the unknown word, but the presence of this white bottle which in mid-desert made one think of a milkman's inadvertence and had the character of a demented invention.

I made a discovery: this country was mad. Not with a noisy and ecstatic madness, but secretly, in the light and the silence. It soothed itself to sleep with incoherence, put out tortuous roads which lost themselves in forgotten landscapes, spun circles of flies, threw up mountains that slashed the dark horizon, weighted down its forests with a floor of ash, spread out its leaden lakes in the thirst of midday, and its fields white and dry with hunger; only in its innumerable beasts could flashes of reality be found. In chasing them and shooting at them, the hunters were trying to re-establish, beginning at the most basic level, some normal contact in this world given over to shapeless dreams. Hunting was an effort toward lucidity.

I wanted to explain this to Maria. She continued to look at us as we left with a face full of sadness and reproach. But she wouldn't have understood me, and was undoubtedly most anxious about her father's state of health. He got up quickly enough from his latest attack of angina, but his face held an expression of misery, a kind of spiritual suffering, as if, in his moments of respite, his sickness reached his soul, leaving far behind not only the need for remedy, but even for consolation.

What consolation? I sensed that with his taste for authority, or for solitude, the innkeeper had long cut himself off from whatever consolation his wife or daughter might have brought him. His voice as he spoke to them never had the inflection he had given it that day, when he described for us his river of gazelles. I could see him at that moment, holding out his hand to imagined wild flanks with lustrous hides and sharply jutting bones. His hand trembled; no doubt because of his angina. But yet it is a blessing of such an illness that it makes the pounding of our heart discernible in our gestures.

Now, the innkeeper kept his silence, and would perhaps forever. I only caught him once, dreaming, immobile, holding his gun without firing. We had been walking north, and came to a stream that had overflowed its banks. There had been heavy rains. Migrating birds were landing there. Small black cranes were grouping themselves in the spindly trees like crows on a gallows. As they came down, they hung in the air, immobile, unfolding their long, dead legs, and making a slow vertical descent.

The light sank and lit only the brown waters. In the depths of the sky, in a tight flight which climbed like a column of smoke, and then spread out like a banner, unraveling and reforming, thousands of sparrows were assembling for their next stage, which would open to them the Sudan, with its black pods of cotton, the millet of the Nile valley and the burning glow of an endless summer. How isolated Ethiopia seemed, relegated to the shadows of the high country!

That evening we sat for a long time without talking. After a few days my companions began to kill again. At night I heard the hyenas walking close to the inn. The creatures we brought back had left traces of their blood or scent on the ground. Mad with fear and frustration the dogs barked at the walls. In the house the two women were up, moving rapidly, speaking in low voices. The innkeeper had suffered a new attack. He died during the night to the howling of dogs.

They buried him in a little cemetery deeply shaded by eucalyptus. My companions went back to their geological work. We no longer had any taste for hunting. One day a man from the plantation came in the greatest agitation. The night before some natives had tried to reach the farm buildings. For three days they had noticed that the field hands looked sullen and tried to avoid their masters. Everything hinted at conspiracy, and the planters had come for the weapons the innkeeper had stockpiled at the end of his life. Where were they?

Maria and her mother were slow to answer, but the man insisted: he would pay. Then the young girl told him that when her father died she had thrown all his munitions into the Aouache. The planter cursed, and left for the capital to look for bullets. He also asked for police reinforcements.

He came back alone two days later supplied with munitions and assured by the administration that a truckload of soldiers would be sent without fail. It was already too late. During the night that followed his visit to the inn, two outbuildings had been burned. There had been shooting, but because of the inadequate supply of bullets the Greeks' defense had been feeble, and one of their men was wounded.

The planters came to the inn, and their companion joined them there on his return from the capital. They were pale with anger. Maria hid. They left with expressions of hatred, and their resentment did not weaken in the days that followed.

In due course, the group I was accompanying was called into another district and had to leave the village. The young girl who had not wept at her father's death came to say goodbye with red eyes. Several months went by. When by chance we came back through the village Maria had already been missing for some weeks. She had gone to walk beside the Aouache. They began to search at nightfall, but every effort proved vain. There were the river current and crocodiles, and on land, hyenas and vultures who came down from the trees with the air whistling through their great gray wings.

I chased away those images. There were also the Ethiopian mornings given up to silence. And there were the birds, diverse and colorful, pursuing their flight over all death: bustards, rhaads, francolins, partridges, pigeons and many others whose names I never knew.

—Translated from the French by Lily Emmet

Charmed Lives

by NADINE GORDIMER

There were two men in the town, a deaf man and a drunkard.

The one was a watchmaker and the other a doctor, and they never met except when the watchmaker consulted the doctor about his stomach ulcer, or the doctor's watch needed cleaning; but they belonged together in the mind of twenty-year-old Kate Shand. This association began for her when she and her brothers were children. For the Shand children there were two kinds of people. There were people their mother had a lot of time for, and people she had no time for. Both the watchmaker and the doctor were in Mrs. Shand's favored category.

The deaf watchmaker, Simon Datnow, was employed by Kate's father in his jeweler's shop. I've got a lot of time for Simon, Mrs. Shand would say consideredly, with a 'mind you,' a sage reservation in her voice. That was because, on the whole, she did not care for relatives; and this man was, in fact, one of the procession of Lithuanian and Russian relatives which Marcus Shand had "brought out" to South Africa before Kate was born, in the early twenties, and whom, ever after, he regarded with a surly indifference quite out of character with his gentle nature —a churlishness created by the conflict in him between family feeling for them and a resentment against them for being the kind of people he would not have expected his wife to like. For though he winced under his wife's scorn of his relatives, there was a perverse pride in him that he should have succeeded in marrying a wife who *would* scorn them. They were used to sleeping, these foreigners, (Mrs. Shand said) on top of the stove. They did not bathe more than once a week. They ate disgusting food, salted fish, and soup made of beetroot. At that time the Shand kitchen still had a coal range; the children pictured these strange aunts and cousins huddled together on the sooty surface after the fire had been raked out in the evening, greasy-fingered, like Esquimaux. It would not have surprised Kate, William and Dykie to hear that the aunts chewed their husbands' boots to soften them.

Simon Datnow was not actually a blood relation of Marcus Shand, but merely the brother of one of Mr. Shand's sisters' husbands. The husband was dead and Simon had 'come out' with his sister-in-law as a kind of substitute protector. Perhaps because there was no blood-tie to rein his resentment with guilt, if Mrs. Shand liked Simon most, Mr. Shand liked him least of the immigrant relations. It seemed to annoy Shand that, after the first year, the deaf watchmaker really owed him nothing; had, unlike the others, nothing in particular for which to be grateful to him. Simon had paid back the passage money which Mr. Shand had advanced, and he was a skilled watchmaker whose equal Mr. Shand could not have hoped to find in South Africa.

Kate always remembered the watchmaker as she used to see him from the door, whenever she entered her father's shop, sitting in his little three-sided glass cage with the inscription, in gold leaf, WATCH REPAIR DEPARTMENT, showing like a banner across his bent head. As Kate grew up, the gold leaf began to peel, and behind the faint loop of the P you could see his left ear more and more clearly. In that ear, from time to time, a new hearing-aid, flesh-colored, black or pearly, would appear; but usually, when he was working, he did not wear one. He would put it on only when you approached to speak to him, and in the moment before you did speak, the moment when the device dropped into contact with his ear, you would see him wince as the roar of the world, from which he had been sealed off like a man dropped in a diving bell to the floor of the ocean, burst in upon him.

A curved bite had been sawed out of the work table at which he sat, and the edge of the wood had long since been worn smooth by the rub of his body as he leaned forward over his work, and it seemed to Kate that he fitted into the table as the table fitted into its glass walls. Before him were tiny, shallow receptacles and metal work-platforms a few inches square on which the delicate tweezers and probe-like instruments with which he worked stalked like timid, long-legged insects among specks of red jewel and minute wheels, and springs that looked like a baby's hair you had run through thumb-and-fingernail. Tiny glass bells protected the innards of watches on which he was not working. She felt she dare not breathe too near the exposed ones, lest they take off on the current of her breath and sail into some crack in the scored and worn table top.

Yet the instruments that worried at them delicately, that picked them up and dipped them into a dewdrop of oil or spirit, and finally fitted them together, were controlled by a pair of blunt, curled hands with broken nails like plates of horn imbedded in, rather than growing from, chapped fingers. The skin of these hands was permanently tarnished from contact with oil and metal and, in winter, was swollen and fissured with dreadful chilblains. The WATCH REPAIR DEPARTMENT was in the draftiest corner of the shop, and it was then that the watchmaker, blue-nosed and pale above his gray muffler, reminded Kate of one of those zoo animals which, denied the lair of its natural habitat, shudders out the cold months in a corner of its cage.

In the summer the watchmaker worked in his shirt-sleeves, with shiny expanding armbands to pull the cuffs up out of the way, and a constant trickle of sweat making his short, graying hair spring out slowly into curl from its confinement of pomade.

Summer and winter, most days, he looked up only when Marcus Shand came stumping over to shove at him a watch for diagnosis, bellowing "Loses twenty-five minutes in twenty-four hours" or "Oiling and cleaning. See if it's in working order." "What?" the deaf man would say in his sibilant, half-inaudible voice, frowning vacantly and fumbling for his "machine"—as he always called his hearing-aid—while he held back from the force of his employer in nervous distaste. Shand would shout in impatient repetition, so that half of what he said would not be heard by the watchmaker, and the other half would thunder in upon him as his aid was switched on. The force of this half-sentence would strike the watchmaker like a blow, so that for a moment he was bewildered and unable to understand anything. Then Mr. Shand would become more impatient than ever, and shout twice as loud.

Because of this communication at cross purposes, Mr.

Shand tended to phrase everything he had to say to his watchmaker as shortly as possible, and to dispense with all graces of politeness, and so almost all that came to Simon Datnow of the outside world for eight hours a day was an assault of surly questions and demands.

Because his watchmaker and relation by marriage was sensitive to the tick of a watch but not to an undertone of the human voice, Shand got into the habit of abusing Simon in mumbled asides, before his very face. It was a great comfort to Shand to be able to abuse someone with impunity. Yet, although it was true he was able to say abusive things without being heard, it was, of course, not possible for these not to show on his face while he said them; and so it was that Simon Datnow felt the revilement more cuttingly than if it had come to him in words, and a wall of thick, inarticulate hostility, far more impenetrable than that of deafness, came to exist between the two men.

It infuriated Mrs. Shand that the only person whom her husband should have the courage to abuse should be someone only half of this world, and, as a result, too uncertain of his ground to take a stand upon it. She herself had tried, and, in fact, went on trying all her life, to get her husband to stand up to *her*. But no; the only person before whom Marcus would dare raise the timid flag of his spirit was a man who couldn't trust himself to interpret the challenge clearly. Mrs. Shand retaliated by championing Simon Datnow.

Datnow, she gave her children to understand, was a natural gentleman, a kind of freak incidence among the immigrant relations. His drudgery became an ideal of conscientious service; his enforced remoteness from the world, an ideal of contemplation. The bewildered, impotent rage that showed in his eyes—the repressed daze of savagery in the eyes of the bull who cannot see where the darts have lodged in the nerves of his shoulders—before the rudeness of her husband which he could not hear, she interpreted as the self-control of a superior being. The meek aspect which his deafness imposed upon him as he went about the town during his lunch hour, seemed to her the quality that should inherit the earth. Even the stomach ulcer from which he suffered as a result of the tension of his work and the fragmentary intensity of his communication with the world, came, through their mother, to be associated in the minds of the Shand children with a quality of exceptional sensitivity.

When Kate was small she would sometimes stand for a long time with her face close to the glass cage, smiling respectfully at the watchmaker when he smiled his slow, saliva-gleaming smile back at her, and nodding her interest when he held up some part of a watch, a piece of metal confetti, for her to see. At the approach of her father she would go still; taking cover from the crude and puzzling aspect of him which showed when he spoke to Simon. This gruff man with the thick strings of vein rising against his collar had nothing to do with the father who would put his cheek to hers and ask, humbly, for a kiss.

One day, a week before Christmas in the year when Kate was nine years old, she was hanging about her father's shop. In the burning mid-summer December of South Africa, the gold-mining town was seedily festive with borax snow in the shop windows, red and blue lights strung round the Town Hall, and the beery voices of miners in sports blazers slapping each other on the back outside the bars. The jeweler's shop was very busy. Kate ran errands for her father and the young Afrikaans sales girl, and drank lukewarm lemon squash in the room behind the shop where cardboard boxes and straw and sheets of tissue paper for packing were kept, and the mice were so impudent that anything edible disappeared while you turned your back.

At this time of year, the watchmaker was constantly interrupted at his work by requests to fit gleaming new watch straps to customers' watches, or to make minor adjustments to necklaces that were too long, or to mend silver bracelets with faulty catches. In order to get his watch repairing done, he came to work early in the morning, before the shop was open, and stayed behind long after it was closed. And all day, while the bustle of customers and the rustle of parcels and the ring of the cash register filled the shop around him, he was bent over his table, trying to do several things at once, often under the harassing, impatient eye of Marcus Shand or the sales girl. His lunch sandwiches remained uneaten. Once, a mouse from the back room ventured into the shop to gnaw at them. His morning and afternoon tea turned pale and scummy in the cup. On the crowded table before him, the tiny viscera of his watches got mislaid beneath the metal straps, the necklaces, the bracelets. He looked like a worried mouse himself, gray-backed, rustling furtively over his jumble of work.

On this particular day, he was so busy that the face of the little girl, who had wandered over to watch him through the glass, did not penetrate his concentration. She watched him a minute or two, nevertheless. He fitted a tiny spring into the intricacy of a watch's belly; over it went a wheel; into some pin-sized holes, three chips of ruby. Then he put out his long tweezers to peck from its spirit-bath something that proved not to be there; he felt about with the tweezers, looked in another dish; at last, lifted his eyebrow so that the jeweler's loupe in his left eye socket fell out into his hand.

He stood up from his stool and looked carefully and methodically under every glass bell, in every dish. He rummaged systematically through the cardboard box-lid where he kept the filings, little twirls of yellow and silver metal like punctuation marks, from the watch straps, the necklaces, the bracelets. He paused a moment, as if deliberating where he should look next. And then, the light of a solution, a calm relief relaxed his face. Slowly, he stood back, creaking his stool away behind him over the cement floor. Then he grasped his work table firmly, palms up under its top, and brought it over, crashing and slithering all its conglomeration of contents on top of himself.

He stood there with his hands hanging at his sides, amid the wreckage. His eyes glittered and his mouth was clenched, so that the skin in which the growing beard showed like fine blue shot was white above and below his stiffened lips. He was breathing so loudly that it could be heard right across the sudden silence of the shop full of people.

Before the shock of that silence broke, Kate ran. Her running broke the silence; she heard, as she pulled the heavy back door of the shop closed behind her, babble and movement spill out. She went trembling across the dirty yard which the shop shared with several others contiguous with it, and sat on a rotting packing case against the wall of the lavatory. It was dank there, with the solitude of dank places. She stayed a long time, playing with some old letterheads, puffy with rain.

When she went back into the shop again, there was a cheerful delegation from a mine, in the part of the shop known as the jewelry department, choosing a canteen of cutlery for presentation to a retiring official. Behind the WATCH REPAIR DEPARTMENT, the watchmaker was putting the last of his tiny containers back at the angle at which it had always stood; only the glass bells were missing, and they must have been swept away by Albert, the African cleaner. The face of the watchmaker, behind the gold leaf letters, was pale and calm.

Presently, he looked up and beckoned to her across the shop, and, hesitantly, she went to him. He gave her one of the three-cornered buns filled with poppyseed that he had brought for his tea, and which he knew she loved. Holding it between finger and thumb, she took the bun into the back room and hid it in a corner, for the mice.

Mrs. Shand had even more time for the doctor than she had for the watchmaker. When Kate or William or Dykie was ill, and Mrs. Shand was expecting Dr. Connor on his morning round of calls, she would have a plate of fresh scones baked ready for tea from before ten o'clock. And if he happened to come earlier, while the Shand house was still in the uproar of cleaning which not even consideration for the patient was allowed to interrupt, Amos and Fat Katie, the servants, and their whining vacuum cleaner and buzzing floor polisher were banished at his approach, trailing the cords of their machines behind them.

Mrs. Shand would stand smiling, with her hands on her hips, while the doctor did his examination of the patient. Even if she had been voicing the gravest misgivings about the nature of the child's malady to her sister or mother over the telephone ten minutes before, Mrs. Shand always seemed to be transformed into a mood of levelheaded confidence the moment the doctor appeared. Her attitude became jocular and skittish: "Show doctor the old tum-tum, darling—really, Dykie, must you wear these pajamas? Why *do* they take fancies to the most unsuitable things, sometimes? Children, oh children . . . !"

Then, the moment the examination was completed, Mrs. Shand and the doctor would disappear into the living room, talking in an intimate undertone, and the child, fevered with self-importance and the desire to know if the pain really might be appendicitis, would lie cross and rigid, straining to separate the murmuring voices into words.

If the other children were at home, they would hang about the passage outside the living room, and now and then the door would open suddenly and their mother's face would appear, requesting more hot water, or another jug of milk. There would be a glimpse of the living room, blue with cigarette smoke, fragrant with tea, the doctor sitting in the big armchair—and then the door would shut firmly again. When Dr. Connor rose to leave, Mrs. Shand would accompany him all the way down the garden path and then stand talking over the gate, or at the window of his car.

She would come slowly back up the path to the house after he had driven off, holding carefully in her hand the prescription he had written; slowly through the house and into the bedroom where her child lay. The child seemed almost a surprise to her. . . . "Well, there you are, darling," she would say, absently. "No school for you for a few days. Now I must go down to the chemist and get this made up. And you're to stay in your bed and not jump about, do you hear? Dr. Connor says—"

Then she would go to the telephone and speak to her mother and her sister again. "Well, he's been. That's what I like about him, when you need him, he's there at once. And, of course, it's just as I thought—a real chill on the stomach, that's all, and he recognized it at once. Good old Robert Eldridge, I'd trust him with my life, any day, in spite of his faults."

Their mother always talked about Dr. Connor by the two imposing Christian names which she had seen on his degree diplomas at his consulting rooms: Robert Eldridge. For years, Kate thought of this form of address vaguely as some sort of designation; it was like speaking of The Major, or The General Manager, or The Editor.

The "faults" in spite of which Mrs. Shand, and, indeed, half the town, trusted Robert Eldridge was, of course, his drunkenness. He was not merely addicted to drink, he was dejectedly chained to it, as the great sheepish dog whom he resembled might be chained to a kennel.

He did not drink at parties, or with friends, but in no company save his own, in solitary, irregular and frequent bouts; sometimes every week, sometimes at intervals of several months, sometimes every day for a month. Once he was sober for more than a year; once he was scarcely sober at all for a year.

Unless he had had a particularly long bout and was in very bad shape indeed, he did not drink at home, but drove out into the veld with his African garden boy and a case of raw South African brandy—the cheapest brand; he did not care what he drank. There he would stay for two or three days. The brandy ensured oblivion, and the African, who asked no questions and offered neither protest nor sympathy nor arguments for reformation, ensured survival.

For the odd thing was that this wretched man, who crept away to drink himself not into euphoria but into stupor and delirium, shamefully, like a sick animal following the instinct to hide its sickness from the sight of others of its kind, wanted to survive. The desire was so strong in him that it seemed to protect him from harm; he drove his car when he was drunk and did not kill himself, and he operated on his patients when he was drunk and did not kill them. So it was that he came to bear, for the people of the town, the legend of a charmed life, and they were not afraid to entrust themselves to him. He lived alone with his old mother in a large, neglected house which had the stunned, withdrawn atmosphere of walls, furniture, possessions which have absorbed the unhappy stare of silent inmates. Here, in the living room with the empty vases, he had sat in morose penitence with his unreproachful mother. Here, in the consulting room, where he examined his patients beneath a pale photograph of his first wife in a Suzanne Lenglen tennis outfit (his wives had come and gone without any sympathy from anyone), he had, in desperate times, concealed brandy in bottles bearing the labels of medicaments. And here, in the hall, where years of dust had turned the black shaggy curls of a mounted wildebeest head into a powdered wig, he had lain at the foot of the stairs whole nights, unable to get up to his room.

The house was silent, yet spoke of all this. Kate, when she was thirteen, heard it. She was going to Dr. Connor's house every day at the time, to have a course of penicillin injections for an outbreak of adolescent boils. She was filled with a bewildering self-disgust because of the boils (her body was punishing her, or being punished; she was guilty, that she knew, though she did not know of what) and there was something in this house of Dr. Connor that recognized, instantly, found common cause with, self-disgust. The wildebeest head, the vases, the pale dead girl in the bandeau claimed kinship with her. You are not alone, they said; there is a whole side of life along with which your feeling belongs.

The claim filled her with dismay and a sense of struggle against some knowledge being forced upon her that she did not want. For the first time, the bony, prematurely white head of Dr. Connor, bent over his big, clean hands as they snapped the top off an ampoule and plunged into it the needle of a syringe, did not seem to her the image of succor and skill and reassurance that it had been all those other times, the times of measles, of tonsillectomy, of the broken arm.

He was a mouth-breather with a loose, wet, kindly lower lip; but today there was no comfort in that audible intake and outlet of breath. Today the uninhabited blue eyes—she had not noticed before that there was no one there—filled her with an indignant, frightened questioning. Where was he gone, and why did everyone go on pretending he was still there? Why, why, why? He had been someone to revere; someone for whom her mother had had a lot of time, "in spite of." Yet why must there always be excuses for grownups, why couldn't they be strong, beautiful, happy? Lying down on the white-covered couch and baring her behind for the needle, she felt her young heart fill with cold cruelty toward the mild-voiced, broken man bending over her.

As Kate Shand grew up, she went less and less often into her father's shop. She was away from the town, of course; first at a boarding school, then at a university. When she did come home, it was always with something of a shock that she saw the shop exactly as it had always been, the watchmaker still at his work in the booth behind the gold leaf lettering. At seventeen, eighteen, she felt the world revolving with her; how could it be that *these* remained static, were found as you had left them, like the castle where the princess pricked her finger and put everything to sleep for a hundred years?

She smiled at the watchmaker across the shop, but she did not cross to speak to him, as if to do so would be to fill with substance again the shadow of the little girl who used to stand there, on the other side of the lettering, watching. The little girl who had seen, one hot Christmas time, the work table turn over shuddering to the ground, as if some beast that slept beneath industry and submissiveness stirred in impotent protest.

Once the childish ills were behind her (the Shand children had run through the whole alphabet of them, from croup to whooping cough, under Dr. Connor) Kate did not need a doctor again for many years, but her mother often did, and, home from the university one vacation, Kate was irritated to hear that Mrs. Shand had "just been over to see Robert Eldridge." "Good God, Mother, why can't you go to a *doctor*?" "That's all right. I'd rather have him than any of these fancy young men." Dr. Connor still drove about in the car that people gave way to as if it were a sacred cow wandering about the streets, was still accepted without comment back under the photograph in the consulting room in the old house after his periodical disappearances.

In books, worms turned, drunkards ended violently in the gutter, the world moved. In the small town, Kate felt, everything held back tolerantly to the pace of, well, for example, those two men for whom her mother had such a lot of time, two men who apprehended the world from a remove—the one looking through glass into an aquarium where silent, mouthing fish swam up to him incomprehensibly and swam away; the other remote behind the glassiness of his own eyes, through which he saw even his own hands, as if he had escaped from them, going on mechanically stitching flesh and feeling pulses.

When Kate graduated and her mother, with her usual capability, announced that she had used her influence with the school board and a post awaited Kate in a local school, all the reasons the girl gave why she would not, could not, ever live in the town again were the logical, rational ones which children have always used in the process of severing themselves from their parents.

But, oddly, for Kate, even as she argued them, pleaded them, they were not true. She was not thinking about the greater academic opportunities, the wider social choice, the cultural stimulation of the city to which she would go; and even if she had dropped the clichés and bluntly substituted for them more money, more men, more pleasure, she would have been no nearer the real reason why she had to go.

This reason—and it was a kind of panic in her—had taken shape for her, slowly, out of all her childhood, in the persons of those two men whom she had known, really, so slightly—the deaf man and the drunkard. Why them? Two harmless and handicapped people who, as her mother often said, had never done a scrap of harm; whom, as a child, Kate had automatically respected because they belonged to the people for whom her mother had a lot of time.

And yet, at twenty, it was because of *them* that Kate knew she could not come back to live in the town. They belonged together in her mind, and from them, from the shards of their images there, she must turn away, to live.

A Visit to Morin

by GRAHAM GREENE

Le Diable au Ciel—there it was on a shelf in the Colmar bookshop, causing a memory to reach for me from the past of twenty years ago. One didn't often in the 1950's see Pierre Morin's novels on display, and yet here were two copies of his once famous book, and looking along the rows of paper bindings I discovered others, as though there existed in Alsace a secret *Cave* like those hidden cellars where wines were once preserved from the enemy for the days when peace would return.

I had admired Pierre Morin when I was a boy, but I had almost forgotten him. He was even then an older writer on the point of abandonment by his public, but the language class in an English public school is always a long way behind the Paris fashions. We happened at Collingworth to have a Roman Catholic master who belonged to the generation which Morin had pleased or offended. He had offended the orthodox Catholics in his own country and pleased the Liberal Catholics abroad; he had pleased too the Protestants who believed in God with the same intensity that he seemed to show, and he used to find enthusiastic readers among non-Christians who, when once they had accepted imaginatively his premises, perhaps detected in his work the freedom of speculation which put his fellow Catholics on their guard. How fresh and exciting his work had appeared to my schoolmaster's generation; and to me, brought up in a lower form on *Les Misérables* and the poems of Lamartine, he was a revolutionary writer. But it is the fate of revolutionaries that the world accepts them. The excitement has gone from Morin's pages. Only the orthodox read him now, when the whole world seems prepared to believe in a god, except strangely enough—but I will not anticipate the point of my small anecdote which may yet provide a footnote to the literary history of Morin's day. When I publish it no harm can be done. Morin will be dead in the flesh as well as being dead as a writer, and he has left, so far as I am aware, no descendants and no disciples.

I yet recall with pleasure those French classes presided over by a Mr. Strangeways from Chile. At these senior classes we no longer studied syntax—at which Mr. Strangeways was in any case weak. Mr. Strangeways read aloud to us and we read aloud to him, but after five minutes we would launch into literary criticism, pulling to pieces with youthful daring—Mr. Strangeways like so many schoolmasters remained always youthful—the great established names and building up with exaggerated appreciation those who had not yet 'arrived.' Of course Morin had arrived years before, but of that we were unaware in our brick prison five hundred miles from the Seine—he hadn't reached the school textbooks: where we didn't understand his meaning, there were no editor's notes to kill speculation.

"Can he really believe that?" I remember exclaiming to Mr. Strangeways when a character in *Le Diable au Ciel* made some dark and horrifying statement on the Atonement or the Redemption; and I remember Mr. Strangeways' blunt reply, flapping the sleeves of his short black gown like a vermin of the night, "But I believe it too, Dunlop." He went on to indicate that we were unconcerned with what the author believed. The author had chosen as his viewpoint the character of an orthodox Catholic—all his thoughts therefore must be affected, as they would be in life, by his orthodoxy. Morin's technique forbade him to play a part in the story himself: even to show irony would be to cheat, though perhaps we might detect something of Morin's view from the fact that the orthodoxy of Durobier was extended to the farthest possible limits, so that at the close of a book we had the impression of a man stranded on a long strip of sand from which there was no possibility of advance, and to retreat toward the shore would be to surrender. 'Is this true or is it not true?' His whole creed was concerned in the answer.

"You mean," I asked Mr. Strangeways, "that perhaps Morin does not believe?"

"I mean nothing of the kind. No one has seriously questioned his catholicism, only his prudence. Anyway that's not true criticism. A novel is made up of words and characters. Are the words well chosen and do the characters live? All the rest belongs to literary gossip. You are not in this class to learn how to be gossip writers."

And yet in those days I would have liked to know. Sometimes Mr. Strangeways, recognizing my interest in Morin, would lend me Roman Catholic literary periodicals which contained notices of the novelist's work that often offended his principle of leaving the author's views out of account. I found Morin was sometimes accused of Jansenism—whatever that might be: others called him an Augustinian—a name that meant as little to me, and in the better printed and bulkier reviews I thought I detected a note of grievance. He believed all the right things, they could find no specific fault, and yet—it was as though some of his characters accepted a dogma so wholeheartedly that they drew out its implications to the verge of absurdity, while others examined a dogma as though they were constitutional lawyers determined on confining it to a kind of legal minimum. Durobier, I am sure, would have staked his life on a literal Assumption: at some point in history, somewhere in the latter years of the first century A.D., the body of the virgin had floated skyward, leaving an empty tomb. On the other hand there was a character called Sagrin, in one of the minor novels, perhaps *Le Bien Pensant,* who believed that the holy body had rotted in the grave like other bodies. The strange thing was that both views seemed to possess irritating qualities to Catholic reviewers, and yet both proved to be equally in accordance with the dogmatic pronouncement when it came. One could claim therefore that they were orthodox, yet the orthodox critics seemed to scent heresy like a rat dead somewhere under the boards, at a spot they could not locate.

These, of course, were ancient criticisms, fished out of Mr. Strangeways' cupboard full of old French magazines dating back to his long-lost sojourn in Paris some time during the late twenties, when he had attended lectures at the Sorbonne and drunk beer at the Dôme. The word 'paradox' was frequently used with an air of disapproval. Perhaps after all the orthodox were proved right, for certainly I was to discover just how far Morin carried in his own life the sense of paradox.

(2)

I am not one of those who revisit their old school, or what a disappointment I should have proved to Mr. Strangeways who must by now be on the point of retirement. I think he had pictured me in the future as a distinguished writer for the weeklies on the subject of French literature—perhaps even as the author of a scholarly biography of Corneille. In fact, after an undistinguished war record, I obtained a post, with the help of influential connections, in a firm of wine merchants. My French syntax, so neglected by Mr. Strangeways, had been improved by the war and proved useful to the firm, and I suppose I had a certain literary flair which enabled me to improve on the rather old-fashioned style of the catalogues. The directors had been content for too long with the jargon of the Wine Society—"An unimportant but highly sympathetic wine for light occasions among friends." I introduced a more realistic note and substituted knowledge for knowingness. "This wine comes from a small vineyard on the western slopes of the Mont Soleil range. The soil in this region has Jurassic elements, as the vineyard is on the edge of the great Jurassic fissure which extends across Europe from the Urals, and this encourages the cultivation of a small, strong, dark grape with a high sugar content less liable than more famous wines to the chances of weather." Of course it was the same 'unimportant' wine, but my description gave the host more material for his vanity.

Business had brought me to Colmar—we had found it necessary to change our agent there, and as I am a single man and find the lonely Christmases of London sad and regretful, I had chosen to combine my visit with the Christmas holiday. One does not feel alone abroad: I imagined drinking my way through the festival itself in some *bierhaus* decorated with holly, myself invisible behind the fumes of cigars. A German Christmas is Christmas par excellence: singing, sentiment, gluttony.

I said to the shop assistant, "You seem to have a good supply of M. Morin's books."

"He is very popular," she said.

"I got the impression that in Paris he is no longer much read."

"We are Catholics here," she said with a note of reproof. "Besides, he lives near Colmar, and we are very proud he chose to settle in our neighborhood."

"How long has he been here?"

"He came immediately after the war. We consider him almost one of us. We have all his books in German also—you will see them over there. Some of us feel he is even finer in German than in French. German," she said, scrutinizing me with contempt as I picked up a French edition of *Le Diable au Ciel,* "has a better vocabulary for the profundities."

I told her I had admired M. Morin's novels since my school days. She softened toward me then, and I left the shop with M. Morin's address—a village fifteen miles from Colmar. I was uncertain all the same whether I would call on him. What really had I to say to him to excuse the vulgarity of my curiosity? Writing is the most private of all the arts, and yet few of us hesitate to invade the writer's home. We have all heard of that one caller from Porlock, but hundreds of callers every day are ringing doorbells, lifting receivers, thrusting themselves into the secret room where a writer works and lives.

I doubt whether I should have ventured to ring M. Morin's bell, but I caught sight of him two days later at the Midnight Mass in a village outside Colmar; it was not the village where I had been told he lived, and I wondered why he had come such a distance alone. Midnight Mass is a service which even a nonbeliever like myself finds inexplicably moving. Perhaps there is some memory of childhood which makes the journey through the darkness, the lighted windows and the frosty night, the slow gathering of silent strangers from the four quarters of the countryside moving and significant.

There was a crib to the left of the door as I came in—the plaster baby sprawled in the plaster lap, and the cows, the sheep and the shepherd cast long shadows in the candlelight. Among the women kneeling, there was an old man whose face I seemed to remember: a round head like a peasant's, the skin wrinkled like a stale apple, with the hair gone from the crown. He knelt, bowed his head, and rose again. There had just been time, I suppose, for a formal prayer, but it must have been a very short one. His chin was stubbled white like the field outside; and there was so little about him to suggest a member of the French Academy, I might have taken him for the peasant he appeared to be, in his suit of respectable and shiny black and his black tie like a bootlace, if I had not been attracted by the eyes. The eyes gave him away: they seemed to know too much and to have seen farther than the seasons and the fields: of a very clear, pale blue, they continually shifted focus looking close and looking away, observant, sad and curious like those of a man caught in some great catastrophe which it is his duty to record, but which he cannot bear to contemplate without a break for any length of time. It was not, of course, during his short prayer before the crib that I had time to watch Morin so closely, but when the congregation was shuffling up toward the altar for Communion, Morin and I found ourselves alone among the empty chairs. It was then I recognized him, perhaps from memories of old photographs in Mr. Strangeways' reviews, I do not know, but I was convinced of his identity, and I wondered what it was that kept this old distinguished Catholic from going up with the others, at this Mass of all Masses in the year, to receive the Sacrament. Had he perhaps inadvertently broken his fast, or was he a man who suffered from scruples and did he believe that he had been guilty of some act of uncharity or greed? There could not be many serious temptations, I thought, for a man who must be approaching his eightieth year. And yet I would not have believed him to be scrupulous; it was from his own novels I had learned of the existence of this malady of the religious, and I would never have supposed the creator of Durobier to have suffered from the same disease as his character. However, a novelist may sometimes write most objectively of his own failings.

We sat there alone at the back of the church. The air was as cold and still as a frozen tree and the candles burned straight on the altar and God, so they believed, passed along the altar rail. This was the birth of Christianity: outside in the dark was old savage Judea, but in here the world was only a few minutes old. It was the Year One again, and I felt the old sentimental longing to believe as those, I suppose, believed who came back one by one from the rail, with lips set like closed doors around the dissolving wafer, and crossed hands. If I had said to one of them "teach me why you believe," what would the answer have been? I thought perhaps I knew, for once in the war—driven by fear and disgust at the sight of the dead—I had spoken to a Catholic chaplain in just that way. He didn't belong to my unit, he was a busy man—it isn't the job of the chaplain in the line to instruct or convert and he was not to blame that he could convey nothing to an outsider like myself of his faith. He lent me two books—one a penny catechism with its catalogue of preposterous questions and answers, smug and explanatory: mystery like a butterfly killed by cyanide, stiffened and laid out with pins and paper strips; the other a sober enough study of gospel dates. I lost them both in a few days, with three bottles of whiskey, my jeep and the corporal whose name I had not had time to learn before he was killed, while I was peeing in the green canal close by. I don't suppose I'd have kept the books much longer anyway. They were not the kind of help I needed, nor was the chaplain the man to give it to me. I remember asking him if he had read Morin's novels. "I haven't time to waste with him," he said abruptly.

"They were the first books," I said, "to interest me in your faith."

"You'd have done much better to read Chesterton," he said.

So it was odd to find myself there at the back of the church with Morin himself. He was the first to leave and I followed him out. I was glad to go, for the sentimental attraction of a Midnight Mass was lost in the long ennui of the Communions.

"M. Morin," I said in that low voice we assume in a church or hospital.

He looked quickly, and I thought defensively, up.

I said, "Forgive my speaking to you like this, M. Morin, but your books have given me such great pleasure." Had the man from Porlock employed the same banal phrases?

"You are English?" he asked.

"Yes."

He spoke to me then in English. "You write yourself? Forgive my asking, but I do not know your name."

"Dunlop. But I don't write. I buy and sell wine."

"A profession more worthy of respect," M. Morin said.

"If you would care to drive with me—I live only ten kilometers from here—I think I could show you a wine you may not have encountered."

"Surely it's rather late, M. Morin. And I have a driver. . . ."

"Send him home. After Midnight Mass I find it difficult to sleep. You would be doing me a kindness." When I hesitated he said, "As for tomorrow, that is just any day of the year, and I don't like visitors."

I tried to make a joke of it. "You mean it's my only chance?" and he replied, "Yes" with seriousness. The doors of the church swung open and the congregation came slowly out into the frosty glitter, pecking at the holy water stoop with their forefingers, chatting cheerfully again as the mystery receded, greeting neighbors. A wailing child marked the lateness of the hour like a clock. M. Morin strode away and I followed him.

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M. Morin drove with clumsy violence, wrenching at his gears, scraping the right-hand hedgerows as though the car were a new invention and he a courageous pioneer in its use. "So you have read some of my books?" he asked.

"A great many, when I was a schoolboy. . . ."

"You mean they are fit only for children?"

"I mean nothing of the sort."

"What can a child find in them?"

"I was sixteen when I began to read them. That's not a child."

"Oh well, now they are only read by the old—and the pious. Are you pious, Mr. Dunlop?"

"I'm not a Catholic."

"I'm glad to hear that. Then I shan't offend you."

"Once I thought of becoming one."

"Second thoughts are best."

"I think it was your books that made me curious."

"I'll not take responsibility," he said. "I'm not a theologian." We bumped over a little branch railway-track without altering speed and swerved right through a gateway much in need of repair. A light hanging in a porch shone on an open door.

"Don't you lock up," I asked him, "in these parts?"

He said, "Ten years ago—times were bad then—a hungry man was frozen to death near here on Christmas morning. He could find no one to open a door: there was a blizzard, but they were all at church. Come in," he said angrily from the porch, "are you looking round, making notes of how I live? Have you deceived me? Are you a journalist?"

If I had had my own car with me I would have driven away. "M. Morin," I said, "there are different kinds of hunger. You seem only to cater to one kind." He went ahead of me into a small study—a desk, a table, two comfortable chairs, and some bookshelves oddly bare—I could see no sign of his own books. There was a bottle of brandy on the table, ready perhaps for the stranger and the blizzard that would never again come together in this place.

"Sit down," he said, "sit down. You must forgive me if I was discourteous. I am unused to company. I will go and find the wine I spoke of. Make yourself at home." I had never seen a man less at home himself. It was as if he were camping in a house that belonged to another.

While he was away, I looked more closely at his bookshelves. He had not rebound any of his paperbooks and his shelves had the appearance of bankrupt stock: small tears and dust and the discoloration of sunlight. There was a great deal of theology, some poetry, very few novels. He came back with the wine and a plate of salami. When he had tasted the wine himself, he poured me a glass. "It will do," he said.

"It's excellent. Remarkable."

"A small vineyard twenty miles away. I will give you the address before you go. For me, on a night like this, I prefer brandy." So perhaps it was really for himself and not for the stranger, I thought, that the bottle stood ready.

"It's certainly cold."

"It was not the weather I meant."

"I have been looking at your library. You read a lot of theology."

"Not now."

"I wonder if you would recommend. . . ." But I had less success with him than I had with the chaplain.

"No. Not if you want to believe. If you are foolish enough to want that you must avoid theology."

"I don't understand."

He said, "A man can accept anything to do with God until scholars begin to go into the details and the implications. A man can accept the Trinity, but the arguments that follow. . . ." He gave a gesture of rejection. "I would never try to determine some point in differential calculus with a two times two table. You end by disbelieving the calculus." He poured out two more glasses and drank his as though it were vodka. "I used to believe in Revelation, but I never believed in the capacity of the human mind."

"You used to believe?"

"Yes, Mr. Dunlop—was that the name?—*used*. If you are one of those who comes seeking belief, go away. You won't find it here."

"But from your books. . . ."

"You will find none of them," he said, "on my shelves."

"I noticed you have some theology."

"Even disbelief," he said with his eye on the brandy bottle, "needs bolstering somehow." I noticed that the brandy very quickly affected him, not only his readiness to communicate with me, but even the physical appearance of his eyeballs. It was as if the little blood-cells had been waiting under the white membrane to burst at once like buds with the third glass. He said, "Can you find anything more inadequate than the scholastic arguments for the existence of God?"

"I'm afraid I don't know them."

"The arguments from an agent, from a cause?"

"No."

"They tell you that in all change there are two elements, that which is changed and that which changes it. Each agent of change is itself determined by some higher agent. Can this go on ad infinitum? Oh no, they say, that would not give the finality that thought demands. But does thought demand it? Why shouldn't the chain go on forever? Man has invented the idea of infinity. In any case how trivial any argument based on what human thought demands must be. The thoughts of you and me and Monsieur Dupont. I would prefer the thoughts of an ape. Its instincts are less corrupted. Show me a gorilla praying and I might believe again."

"But surely there are other arguments?"

"Four. Each more inadequate than the other. It only needs a child to say to these theologians, why?—why not? Why not an infinite series of causes? Why should the existence of a good and a better imply the existence of a best? This is playing with words. We invent the words and make arguments from them. The better is not a fact: it is only a word and a human judgment."

"You are arguing," I said, "against someone who can't answer you back. You see, M. Morin, I don't believe either. I am curious, that's all."

"Ah," he said, "you've said that before—curious. Curiosity is a great trap. They used to come here in their dozens to see me. I used to get letters saying how I had converted them by this book or that. Long after I had ceased to believe myself I was a carrier of belief, like a man can be a carrier of disease without being sick. Women especially." He added with disgust, "I had only to sleep with a woman to make a convert." He turned his red eyes toward me and really seemed to require an answer when he said, "What sort of a Rasputin life was that?" The brandy by now had really taken a hold: I wondered how many years he had been waiting for some stranger without faith to whom he could speak with frankness.

"Did you never tell this to a priest? I always imagined in your faith. . . ."

"There were always too many priests," he said, "around me. The priests swarmed like flies. Near me and any woman I knew. First I was an exhibit for their faith. I was useful to them, a sign that even an intelligent man could believe. That was the period of the Dominicans who liked the literary atmosphere and good wine. Then afterward when the books stopped, and they smelled something—gamy—in my religion, it was the turn of the Jesuits, who never despair of what they call a man's soul."

"And why did the books stop?"

"Who knows? Did you never write verses for some girl when you were a boy?"

"Of course."

"But you didn't marry the girl, did you? The unprofessional poet writes of his feelings and when the poem is finished he finds his love dead on the page. Perhaps I wrote away my belief like the young man writes away his love. Only it took longer—twenty years and fifteen books." He held up the wine. "Another glass?"

"I would rather have some of your brandy." Unlike the wine it was a crude and common mark, and I thought again: for a beggar's sake or his own? I said, "All the same you go to Mass."

"I go to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve," he said. "The worst of Catholics goes then—even those who do not go at Easter. It is the Mass of our childhood. And of mercy. What would they think if I were not there? I don't want to give scandal. You must realize I wouldn't speak to any one of my neighbors as I have spoken to you. I am their Catholic author, you see. Their academician. I never wanted to help anyone to believe, but God knows I wouldn't take a hand in robbing them. . . ."

"I was surprised at one thing when I saw you there, M. Morin."

"Yes?"

I said rashly, "You and I were the only ones who didn't take Communion."

"That is why I don't go to the church in my own village. That too would be noticed and cause scandal."

"Yes, I can see that." I stumbled heavily on (perhaps the brandy had affected me, too). "Forgive me, M. Morin, but I wondered at your age what kept you from Communion. Of course, now I know the reason."

"Do you?" Morin said. "Young man, I doubt it." He looked at me across his glass with impersonal enmity. He said, "You don't understand a thing I have been saying, do you? What a story you would make of this if you were a journalist, and yet there wouldn't be a word of truth. . . ."

I said stiffly, "I thought you made yourself perfectly clear that you had lost your faith."

"Do you think that would keep anyone from the Confessional? You are a long way from understanding the Church or the human mind, Mr. Dunlop. Why, it is one of the most common confessions of all for a priest to hear—almost as common as adultery. 'Father, I have lost my faith.' The priest, you may be sure, makes it himself often enough at the altar before he receives the Host."

I said—I was angry in return now, "Then what keeps you away? Pride? One of your Rasputin women?"

"As you so rightly thought," he said, "women are no longer a problem at my age." He looked at his watch, "Two-thirty, perhaps I ought to drive you back."

"No," I said. "I don't want to part from you like this.

It's the drink that makes us irritable. Your books are still important to me. I know I am ignorant. I am not a Catholic and never shall be, but in the old days your books made me understand that at least it might be possible to believe. You never suddenly closed the door in my face as you are doing now. Nor did your characters, Durobier, Sagrin." I indicated the brandy bottle. "I told you just now—people are not only hungry and thirsty in that way. Because you've lost *your* faith. . . ."

He interrupted me ferociously. "I never told you that."

"Then what have you been talking about all this time?"

"I told you I had lost my belief. That's quite a different thing. But how are you to understand?"

"You don't give me a chance."

He was obviously striving to be patient. He said, "I will put it this way. If a doctor prescribed you a drug and told you to take it every day for the rest of your life and you stopped obeying him and took no more, and your health decayed, would you not believe in your doctor all the more?"

"Perhaps. But I still don't understand you."

"For twenty years," Morin said, "I excommunicated myself voluntarily. I never went to Confession. I loved a woman too much to pretend to myself that I would ever leave her. You know the condition of absolution? A firm purpose of amendment. I had no such purpose. Five years ago my mistress died and my sex died with her."

"Then why couldn't you go back?"

"I was afraid. I am still afraid."

"Of what the priest would say?"

"What a strange idea you have of the Church. No, not of what the priest would say. He would say nothing. I dare say there is no greater gift you can give a priest in the Confessional, Mr. Dunlop, than to return to it after many years. He feels of use again. But can't you understand? I can tell myself now that my lack of belief is a final proof that the Church is right and the faith is true. I had cut myself off for twenty years from grace and my belief withered as the priests said it would. I don't believe in God and His Son and His angels and His saints, but I know the reason why I don't believe and the reason is—the Church is true and what she taught me is true.

For twenty years I have been without the Sacraments and I can see the effect. The wafer must be more than wafer."

"But if you went back. . . ."

"If I went back and belief did not return? That is what I fear, Mr. Dunlop. As long as I keep away from the Sacraments, my lack of belief is an argument for the Church. But if I returned and they failed me, then I would really be a man without faith, who had better hide himself quickly in the grave so as not to discourage others." He laughed uneasily. "Paradoxical, Mr. Dunlop?"

"That is what they said of your books."

"I know."

"Your characters carried their ideas to extreme lengths. So your critics said."

"And you think I do too?"

"Yes, M. Morin."

His eyes wouldn't meet mine. He grimaced beyond me. "At least I am not a carrier of disease any longer. You have escaped infection. Time for bed, Mr. Dunlop. Time for bed. The young need more sleep."

"I am not as young as that."

"To me you seem very young."

He drove me back to my hotel and we hardly spoke. I was thinking of the strange faith which held him even now after he had ceased to believe. I had felt very little curiosity since that moment of the war when I had spoken to the chaplain, but now I began to wonder again. M. Morin considered he had ceased to be a carrier, and I couldn't help hoping he was right. He had forgotten to give me the address of the vineyard, but I forgot to ask him when I said good night.

The Abduction

by MARIANNE HAUSER

The plane was flying high above the clouds. Dusty, frail as a moth, the little maestro gazed out the window, down, down at the cloud world. His hair was so white with age, it almost looked gold where it bent at the collar of his moth-chewed tailcoat in stray wisps. And his peaked face, yellow and sunken, showed barely a wrinkle, as if time had erased its own marks in the dust.

He never had been on a plane before. But his clear blue eyes were serene. He might have flown above those clouds all his life. Feebly, yet with the innate skill of the master, his fine veined hand beat time to the engine roar whose orchestral vibrations had fallen into a familiar rhythm. He thought he recognized the *Allegro con fuoco* from his first symphony, a youthful, glittering work which had brought him such immediate fame, countless standing ovations—how long ago? he thought, beating time.

But it might have happened last night, that shower of applause and roses. It might be happening now. He nodded, listening across sixty odd years into space. It took him no effort to catch the tunes of the distant past. Its harmonies always had been nearer to him than the dissonant present. And on this vibrant, this musical flight, his mind was free to roam more lightly than ever, backwards through the whirling blue above the cloud foam.

No dreary obligations blocked the journey. Quick as a flash, he felt himself whisked down the grand boulevards of the world, his white scarf, his black coattails flying. By express train, steamer, fiacre, droshky, sleigh, he sped to keep his appointment with royalty. They had come to watch his ivory baton and hear his music: kings, queens, the Prussian prince, the Russian czar, and his own emperor of course, dear old Franz Joseph. What matter if the crowned head was sure to drop off to sleep during the first pianissimo? The thundering applause would soon wake him up. Bravo, Maestro! Maestro! The ladies swooned. The beautiful empress wept. The critics were unanimous in their praise, and three cannon shots were fired into the frosty sky to salute the maestro. He had returned to his native Budapest, at the end of a brilliant tour. He had been everywhere, as far as Chicago. Now he was home. The emperor knighted him, and the Academy made him an honorary member for life. His bust was cast in bronze and wreathed with laurel. All this before he had reached his twentieth birthday—how long ago?

But it might have been last night, that long celebration, the fireworks and champagne toasts, the ladies, he thought, the ladies—his hand fluttering to his lips to hush an impatient drummer. *A Star has risen . . . Immortality is his . . .* The banner waved before his eyes, magnified, with the printer's ink not yet dry. "A star has risen . . ." He nodded and smiled. For the moment he had forgotten that his star was a fallen star and that his music was dead; as dead as the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELTS. The command over the speaker produced a crackling chord in his ear, a diminished seventh, he judged, frowning, shaking his head at the crude interruption of his fluty adagio. He had not caught the words, only the dissonance. But already a pair of hands had materialized out of thin air, buckling his seat belt, wiping his tremulant chin. "Comfy? Are you comfy?" a voice was saying coaxingly as to a baby. He didn't hear. He had grown almost deaf during the last few years, though he was not conscious of any deafness. On the contrary, his hearing was sharper than ever, perhaps too sharp, he often thought. All the time his ears were buzzing with symphonies, operas, lieder, and with the endless dialogues of the past. Music and talk and the clatter of horse-drawn carriages by the Danube: often the noise kept him from going to sleep. Not even the night was silent.

"Relax. Now don't you worry. Try to sleep." A storm was gathering in the west. The hands were pulling his seat belt tighter. The plane had begun to climb, and now he noted the Red Cross worker, or rather her mannish uniform as she hovered above him. He saw no skirt. Who was this soldier? Why had he tied him up? the maestro wondered, confused and troubled as he tugged at the strange army blanket over his knees, and shied away from those hands. "You are safe. Safe and on your way to the United States," she assured him. But he heard only a fuzzy purr, related to no language or musical instrument. What did they want from him? Why was he on this plane? He must have known the answer at one time. But it had slipped his mind. The present had no substance. You couldn't hold it. It flashed up and vanished like fireflies in the woods. He couldn't begin to remember how he had come to leave Budapest, to what end. The entire meaning of the flight was nebulous. He hadn't even tried to grasp it. He had been too carried away by the other flight backwards into his youth.

But now that singing flight was interrupted. Here he sat, tied fast like a prisoner. Who were his captors? His blue eyes hardened, shocked into fear, while the woman tried her best to soothe him. He had been such an easy passenger before, trusting and mild—this shrunken shadow who used to be a great musical light, someone had told her. He had been no problem, unlike some other refugees in her care, the young student, for instance, who had gone berserk minutes before they had boarded the plane. The little maestro had given her no trouble. He had nodded and smiled all the way. Maybe he was scared because of the oncoming storm, she supposed, gently restraining him as he clawed at the seat belt. "It's just a stretch of bad weather. It will be over in no time," she said, patting his shoulder, wiping the spittle off his quivering chin. He had weathered more serious storms in Budapest, she said, and on the instant stopped, bewildered. For now he was shaking more than before, and she wondered if he mightn't be frightened in memory of that recent bloodshed. "What's past is past." She smoothed his wispy baby hair. "Sleep now. Forget the past." With a helpless shrug she moved on, down the aisle.

But of course he was in terror of forgetting—oh not the most recent past, not the freedom fight of which she perhaps thought him an unsung hero. That past had never sunk in. The good old days, the golden days were being eclipsed—by what shadow? He peered about him. The plane was crowded with passengers, bundles, baskets, and only the seat next to him was not occupied. The vacancy increased his suspicion of a deep plot. About him was a sea of amorphous faces. A black eye patch was staring at him, providing no clue.

Had he been kidnapped by the Russians? The Prussians? The frequent lapses of memory to which he had been long accustomed, now threatened his life. Perhaps the Soviets had captured him—perhaps the Nazis, he considered as an afterthought. For the end of that political regime never had impressed itself upon his mind. There had been too many dictatorships, revolutions, too many wars. It was impossible to keep count. Chronology had been thrown to the winds, to the dogs, at the fall of the Hapsburgs. He clutched the belt, aware all at once of the storm. The plane was bouncing drunkenly. And now the decades seemed jumbled beyond hope. Again he scanned that sea of faces for at least one clue. But there was none.

Or was it all a figment of his old brain—this flying ship tossed by the winds, this blur of faces like drowned clocks? Now and then he might be haunted by similar ghosts. It was the price an old man had to pay—a small price, considering how tranquil his life usually was, how harmonious, he reminded himself. And he anxiously turned his eyes back to the window in quest of the harmonious clouds he so loved.

But the clouds had erupted. The engine shrieked, revealing sulphur craters in a sudden brutal clash of brass. The cacophony made him jerk away from the window and pull the army blanket up over his ears. But he couldn't shut out the infernal din, that abomination which passed for music nowadays, he thought grimly, slamming his fists to his ears. The new composers, they were discomposers, howling and stamping on the grave of his songs. They had taken over to rule the earth. But now they were taking over the heavens. Not even he had thought that it would come to that.

To what alien grave was he being flown? To what barbarous, tone-deaf hell? NO RETURN. NO RETURN, the engine was shrieking. The spectre of an irrevocable exile loomed more disastrous than death. Ah, planes might crash, burst into flame, save this one fortress which had been built to dare the elements and scorn the angels, the maestro whispered, shutting his eyes. He did not fear a crash. He feared the exile, inhuman, cold, no matter what its climate, nameless, unrecorded on any map, and worlds removed from his birds.

His little birds . . . Dear God, he had not fed them. The omission came to him only now. A dozen birds left helpless, without sustenance, were trusting him to return, trusting in vain. Lovebirds and parakeets. His feathered loves. He saw them wait for him in the dim basement which had become his home at the end of the melodious empire when his own melodies had been put to an end. Once upon a time or yesterday, he lived in the empress' summer pavilion, a graceful aviary above the Danube. Now his aviary was an old basement downtown. He always kept the windows closed, the cages open, so that the birds could fly at will, round and round the crystal chandelier that hung from the smoked ceiling with singular majesty—a relic of his bright fame. The chandelier tinkled. It sang, and the prisms glowed with the jewel colors of his birds.

Tweet tweet . . . He whistled thinly. He tapped a finger to the safety belt. He smiled and bent his head, waiting for one of the birds to alight as they would at home in the basement, on his old head, or on his marble head in a damp corner below a crisscross of sputtering pipes. The marble head, portrait of the young maestro, was a favorite with all the birds. They'd perch on it, chattering, pecking, whetting their beaks on cheeks, brow, nose or lips to his endless amusement. The stone used to be smooth and white. Now it was scarred. Now it looked older than the old maestro. Streaked, thickly incrusted with bird droppings, it sat in the cellar light like a barnacled figurehead submerged in the sea.

Tweet . . . tweet . . . But there were other relics, swimming trophies. Really, the basement might be a drowned garden, what with the swirl of feathers like little fishes, even inside the old concert grand; and the sun and the moon of his memory shedding the same pearly light. The dry laurel wreath broke into leaf as the birds flitted through it and chased each other around the flower tributes that were embalmed under glass like wedding bouquets. Which bird was the bride? Concert posters, yellowed, blotched with moisture, clung to the walls; plumes, medals; sepia photographs of royalty in stiff poses; and, wonderfully soft, plump and bedizened, a galaxy of female opera stars. Some had been his mistresses. Some had been his wives. The distinction was blurred. And the few singers who had resisted his charm, had long since been seduced by the charm of time. There used to be jealous fights among his Valkyries. Now there was peace. Now they were united in one chorus: full-throated, heroic sopranos richly endowed, who might go twenty minutes at full pitch, outsinging the orchestra on their ride to Valhalla.

Ho-Yo-To-Ho! The echo persisted as he watched the birds pick at the silver breastplates of his Brunhild, and brush Isolde's golden tresses flirtatiously with blue-tipped wings. Isolde, Isolde. She had been his unhappy love. She had left him for a horn player, a Socialist organizer who never had been in tune with the rest of the brass. But now she had rejoined the loyal chorus. His sorrow had been washed away by time. The maestro remembered his amorous conquests as so many happy improvisations on one classic theme. What other recluse had ever lived such a diverting life? For a recluse he was of course, with a deaf ear to the outside world which had turned deaf to his music. Only the birds still knew his scores by heart. He heard their song, and through its overtones, hushed footsteps. Here comes our empress, he might say to the birds. Look, look at her sad eyes. My dark, poetic empress. She has been weeping.

His feathered darlings read his mind. They were his soul mates, his soul—vain little devils! He'd chuckle knowingly, wagging a finger as they would peck at the warped mirror, kissing their own clouded image. And he would suspensefully hold his breath, waiting for the tickle of a kiss, a quick staccato, as the green parakeet would fly to him and pick a sunflower seed from his rapt, toothless mouth . . .

Poor birds. Who would feed them now? The plane was shaking in the storm, and a sick notion of guilt or death was upon him. He saw them disheveled and starved in the cold basement. They were not likely to find nourishment. The windows were shut. And supposing someone (but who!) set them loose in the street, would they not perish, recluses as they were, like their old master? Their wings were unaccustomed to the sky. His basement was their freedom. Indeed, he could now less than ever calculate why he had left the freedom of his basement, why he had not perished.

He had been fed more than enough on this flight—

chicken broth, sweet custard, milk and honey. To be thus fattened by his abductors, must be a sinister link in the chain of intrigue. Not in years had he eaten so well. And there were his birds, forsaken utterly, without a bread crumb. May the blessed Virgin forgive. A tear rolled down onto the army blanket which might belong to any army under the sun. He shivered, and clasping his neck, he beheld the disaster: his grand piano filled with the cadavers of his poor darlings. The carved old instrument, mildewed, unplayed for ages, yet with the lid always propped open as if for a last supreme performance down in the basement, was now one mass grave.

"I must send word to Budapest," the maestro said in an urgent whisper. He was addressing all the passengers at once, that silent, anonymous crowd which might have been shipwrecked, or kidnapped like himself, for all he knew. Still he felt no kinship, discerning no human features, only a blur as of pale lamps in the rain. Yet the moldy smell was reminiscent of his own four walls. He blinked and sniffed. For a moment, the fog yielded fragments of human reality: a squirming baby in a laundry basket; a peasant girl's large-knuckled hands; a poker game; a French horn strapped to a field-pack; a pair of crutches; a monk, dark-faced under a tattered cowl, and counting his beads.

"Pray for my birds." But the plea was drowned by the engine, and the fragments sank back into the anonymous fog. The sky had grown quite dark. It must be night, the maestro thought, wiping the steamed window-pane. Blue flames came spurting from the propellers, flaring up aggressively at regular intervals. Perhaps this was a shooting war. The fire he saw might be machine gun fire. Perhaps he was the innocent victim of another global war in which he could not possibly take sides, having no intelligence about it whatever. They might be shooting for the man in the moon, he thought, hiding his nose in the blanket, and in that moldy odor of damp wool.

He had been victimized by politics. That much seemed certain. But the political scene was vaguer to him than was the man in the moon, his political phases. He didn't even know who was conducting Hungary's affairs, or the orchestra, for that matter—the two were closely linked in his mind. He hadn't followed the news in ages and ages. Still a sour note might reach him occasionally as he would emerge from his basement to store up on food supplies for himself and his birds. Then, walking down the windy street at dusk, with a shopping basket under the opera cape, and a frayed velvet cap over one eye, he might hear a newspaper boy yell into his ear: Revolution! Or: Murder! Or: War! To him it was all the same, one vulgar refrain, the same old theme of violence—"off key!" he might snap with acute irritation, flicking his wrist under the billowing cape. He didn't in the least enjoy those outings. But he and his birds must eat. Poor as he was, he needn't starve. A small pension check continued to arrive by mail every month, providing the only sequence in a universe of exploded values, he might reflect.

So he would proceed in the shadow of the massive, carved houses where the aristocracy used to reside and which now were part of a vast jungle of slums, with children crawling out of the dilapidated masonry, and the wash hanging over the fat round balconies like tattered flags. A chipped enameled sign ENTRANCE FOR GENTLEFOLK ONLY might meet his bewildered eyes amid overflowing trash cans and ragged pedestrians. It would give him a melancholy feeling, that faded legend in the dusk, FOR GENTLEFOLK ONLY. And halting, staring at a pock-marked door as at a sheet of musical notations, he would think of the winter nights when carriages had drawn up by this house in the diamond snow, and ladies, sparkling with diamonds, had alighted under the milky gas lamps, into his arms.

STRIKE! MURDER! WAR! The newsboy's shrill call would drive him on through the autumn wind. A pushcart turned over. Children spilled from an alley. "Birdman! Birdman!" He did not hear them. Once a boy aimed a rock at him, perhaps out of some primeval savagery, as if he meant to stone not a man, but a bird. The maestro never was aware of the attack. The rock never hit him, protected or obscured as he was by his wide, flying opera cape as though by the latent aura of his past glory.

REVOLUTION! WAR! That call he heard. It rang from the breadline outside the grocery store; it followed him back to the basement. There, safe among his birds again, he might even try to read up on current events. For the food he bought was customarily wrapped in newspapers. But the herring might be wrapped in last week's news, the bird seeds in last month's. Confusion reigned. No one could follow the score of this pandemonium! he might exclaim. There was more news value in the ancient clippings he had preserved, items pertaining to social gossip, horse races, royalty, and to the royal reception of his ten symphonies. Even the dust, as one of the clippings might disintegrate between his fingers, suggested a final logic, an ultimate truth. But the grocer's shopworn papers suggested nothing. Where was the golden thread of melody? he might ask, wryly smiling at a gray void, a wet blotch on the sheet where the printer's ink had been washed away by the herring. Whatever had been washed away, another national or international crisis, it couldn't alter his tempo or that of his birds. The concert of powers had ceased to exist for him. Let them run the orchestra into the ground! Let it burn in its man-made hell to the devilish strains of the twelve-tone row! he would mutter, crumpling the papers. And he would shove them into the little iron stove to make a fire and fry his fish.

Flying blind on the waves of night, his body strapped to the seat, his flesh numb, the maestro let his thoughts dwell on the fire and on the cozy sizzle of the fish in the pan. He held out his hands for warmth. The stove seemed quite near, although he himself felt further away from home than ever before—frozen to this unyielding seat. He ached for his battered old armchair. He longed for his basement, the faces of his singing loves on all the walls, and upon the windowpanes the haphazard calligraphy of bird droppings. Two square little windows flush with the street: he was homesick for the limited view they offered him—a mere strip of broken pavement, and sometimes the yellow eyes of a cat in vain pursuit of his birds; and always the feet of passers-by moving on in copper dust or moted light as in a continual sunset, he imagined. Feet shod or bare. Trim spike heels. Muddy sandals, bloody rags. And army boots of course, in peace, in war. The army boots were all alike, producing the same dull throb in his brain, whether they be goose-stepping or ambling along out of step or creeping along.

How then was he to tell one foreign occupation from another, one insurrection from another? he argued, his pointed nose twitching for a lost scent.

Boots, boots, he murmured in that monotonous rhythm of boots on the march. But the rhythm was broken. A rumble as of a battery of tanks was shaking his memory. Or was it thunder? Was he flying through thunder? he asked, his head shooting out from under the army blanket. But he had guessed at thunder, too, that ambivalent late evening or night when a similar rumble had filled the basement, a shade more distantly perhaps, in a lower, more threatening key. The threat had not eluded his birds. Out of the concert grand they had swarmed in a perturbed, aimless cloud. "It's past your bedtime!" he had warned. "Off with you! Back to sleep . . ." clapping his hands, shushing the birds away from his eyes with a sudden annoyance as they had swarmed about him frantically, blindly. They had hurled themselves against the mirror on the wall like bats, or insects trying to escape through a shut window, he had thought, determined to ignore their panic, yet with his own heart already fluttering wildly. His hands had trembled so, he hadn't been able to scrape the burned skin off the fish. Still he had sat down to his meal. Through the soiled windowpane, in a crescendo rumble, he had noted the glossy dark pavement, empty, and the next moment, as he had looked again, already flooded by feet on the run. The thunderstorm is chasing them, he had reasoned, bending over his tin plate and then peering out again, incredulously, at the deserted pavement, and at a single baby shoe in a puddle of blood.

But surely the red stain spreading outside his window must be a reflection from somebody's shop sign or lamp, the maestro had speculated. Was that why he had left the basement—to verify that the blood was not blood? he wondered now, sitting rigidly, with his fingertips pressed to his throbbing temples. His memory was like the crazy wild flight of his birds—a constant shifting and breaking of colors, patterns, tone clusters, unrelated, dissonant. He brushed a remembered feather out of his eyes. He cocked his head, listening. And through the grinding, turning memory wheel, he heard the brief whir of a bullet, and saw a severed blue-green wing spread flat against the sack of coal by the stove, and on a concert poster on the wall a splash of blood.

But how calm he had suddenly been, he remembered, feeling that calm like a hard lump lodged in his flesh, like some old bullet incarcerated in his chest, and dating back to a war he had long since forgotten and might not have fought in at all. The birds had gone to sleep again. The rumble had ceased. The crystal chandelier had still been swaying, and a splinter had crumbled from the edge of the bullet hole in the mirror. His face had looked at him from the shattered glass disjointedly, at odd, crystalized angles. For some moments he had been convinced that the bullets must have been fired from behind the mirror. And only slowly had he realized (and by then he had been investigating the basement like a detective) that the bullet had entered through the window of course. Some fool had sent a bullet through his basement window by accident. For no one, so he figured (with the same calm, with barely a tremor), would waste ammunition on a small lovebird, or on himself, at that. It hadn't occurred to him that he might have been meant as a target of death. The death of the bird (whose remains he could not discover, save for one wing and the bloody splash of guts) was an accident like a wrong note, a sharp instead of a flat in an otherwise correctly played measure. How such accidents used to throw him into a rage during rehearsal! "Bunglers! Idiots! Murderers!" He'd fling the invectives at the dismayed orchestra—and oh, they had feared him, he knew, and yet had loved him for his passion, his rage for perfection. Crestfallen, they'd sit out the storm as he might fling the baton over his shoulder, and threaten to step down from the podium forever, and never to compose again in time or space.

Never to compose again, the maestro whispered. It was with an effort that he recalled the death of one bird, when surely all his birds were dead by now, their bones already part of the dust that had collected inside the concert grand through the ages. Dust to dust, he murmured, scanning the disaster from far above, from a bird's-eye view up here in the clouds. But the clouds were gone. A crescent moon, a slice of Persian melon, the palest green, sailed past his cheek as he leaned to the window. He nodded yes. This was the moon for lovers—tasting her smooth caress. And now he recollected placidly, with only the faintest wonder or disbelief (as if he were tailing another person, a vague acquaintance of another age), how he had stepped out through the basement door in a mild rain, in the same tailcoat he was wearing up here in the air, and with a small pearl-handled revolver in the breast pocket which now was empty. But the pocket might have been empty all along. The weapon had weighed next to nothing, delicately wrought as it was, a plaything made to fit a small evening purse, although the woman who used to own it had been a large matron well on in years, a member of the high nobility, the landed gentry. She had been his last mistress. But what on earth (or in heaven, for doubtless, she was dead) had been her name? He couldn't remember. He remembered his loves by their opera roles, and that last love of his had not been singing. Voiceless, she would come to him after dark, veiled like a Turk, with her moon-slit eyes above the veil, and the odor of her husband's pipe in her thick Magyar hair. And always she would steal in through the back door marked ENTRANCE FOR SERVANTS, because of her wealth and her husband's prominent station at court. The pair had fled the country upon the collapse of the monarchy, and it was the night before her departure that she had brought the lethal gift to the maestro, presenting it with a low curtsy, as though it were a precious baton on a salver, awarded him in homage of his art, it seemed to him now.

There had been no salver of course. The gift had been wrapped unceremoniously in the front page of the *Budapest News.* The headline, proclaiming the birth of the republic, had circled the parcel like a black ribbon. "This is for your protection, your future." She had knelt heavily to kiss his hand, and he never had asked what sort of protection she had in mind for him, what future, whether she expected him to restore the empire, or shoot a bullet through at least one Bolshevik, or through himself. It had not mattered. He never had unwrapped the gun. He had put it away with other souvenirs, love letters, garters, a lock of hair from his Isolde. The gun had been a love token, one of many, and he had been oblivious of its existence until that particular accident, the accidental death of one bird.

Feeling the touch of the crescent moon on his cheek, he saw himself engaged in the ritual of unwrapping the gun; saw himself twice: in memory and in the shattered remembered mirror. A weak bulb burning overhead, he scanned the headline of the newborn republic, carefully folding the paper before he examined the weapon in search of what identity, what clue? The letter *I* in the bejeweled, crested monogram might stand for Ilonka or Irmengard, but not for Isolde. Shrugging, he laid the gun down on the piano (not a sound from his birds!) and then began to dress thoughtfully, slowly, in the narrow black trousers and swallow-tailed coat which used to be his professional uniform. Those clothes, ravaged by moths, had become too large for him, he found. But of course he had not worn them since he had stepped down from the podium after a farewell performance which had been doomed from the start by catcalls, hisses, boos, and by the volley of machine guns outside on the square. Player after player had turned tail. The concert master had never shown up. Had there been any fiddles left? Still the maestro had kept to his post, a fated hero, conducting what he had lost. A rotten egg had splattered against the back of his coat as he had flung his arm out commandingly to give the upbeat to one loyal bassoon.

But the bassoon, too, must have deserted before the finale, and even the audience must have dispersed, finally. Leaving his basement, his sleeping birds, for the dark, empty street, it seemed to him that he had beaten time in an empty hall, to no audible music. Not a sound. Not a sign of life, only the lost baby shoe in a rain puddle outside his two windows where the light shone through a mist. All the other windows were dark, he saw, surveying the silence in the thin rain. His feet were drenched. He was still in his felt slippers. He had forgotten his collar and tie, and was in fact still wearing his gray flannel shirt under the formal coat.

But this had happened to him before, his stepping up to the podium in the wrong shirt, the maestro thought, nodding left and right into the rain before he took his position by the few slippery steps that led down to his basement. There, gun in hand, he stood guard. The sky had a purple glow, and the air was acrid, yet sweet, perhaps with spent ammunition or blood, or with the decaying autumn leaves afloat below the surface of the Danube, he imagined. Strangely, the death smell conjured up briefly some light-hearted moments of childhood translucent-like color slides—his first boat ride on the Danube along the yellow vineyards under a glassy sky; his first kiss in an abandoned churchyard under a dry rain of pine needles.

But the colors of childhood always did float below the surface of water or night, the maestro mused, standing guard. To what absent bassoon was he giving the upbeat? he wondered, raising the gun a little, surveying the dark, that empty orchestra pit in the rain-sweet wind. But the rain had stopped. A small fat moon was climbing the furthest roof. The dark fell away like a curtain, and on the downsloping street he saw the jagged outlines of a tank—a giant prehistoric beast, massive, obscenely horned and armored. It did not move. But was it dead? he asked, instantly alerted by the white glare of the beast's single eye, ready to fire at that eye should the beast make one move. For he knew with a cold certainty that it must be responsible for the accident, and that it might in its clumsy monstrous power kill all the birds by accident, those in his basement, those in the sky, and the pigeons asleep in the cote up there on the roof where the moon was rolling lazily.

"We must have no more accidents," the maestro warned sharply. The beast's eye winked in response. And now a litter of helmeted shadows detached itself from the beast, slowly spilling from its panzered belly in a metallic echo of labor groans. Here was his clue. His hand was steady as he aimed and fired a number of shots precisely in tempo. A helmeted figure flew high—to fall on the moon, he thought. But already it had dropped back to earth with a scream the maestro did not hear, did not remember.

Thy will be done, he murmured. The plane was gliding through the night. How long since the storm had subsided? The sky was riddled by myriad stars. The sky was a moth-chewed old coat hung up to the light. The sky was a sloping meadow studded with daisies. He nodded and smiled, oblivious again of his adventure outside the basement, and of the birds in the basement, and of the unsolved mystery behind the flight. A human form bent over him. A full breast tipped against his shoulder. "You needn't keep the seat belt fastened." Hands were untying him. "We are having perfect weather."

The Red Cross worker had sat down next to him in the vacant seat. The other passengers had gone to sleep. Only the maestro was still awake. His eyes, gentian blue, she clearly recalled, looked black in the dimness. She heard him talk to himself, singingly, feebly, doubtless in Hungarian, she guessed with a sigh. She had no idea how this moribund little old gentleman had managed to cross the treacherous border. She had heard conflicting rumors—one that a young peasant woman had lugged him across the swamps, strapped to her back like a baby. But according to another rumor, he had been rescued by a Socialist horn player, a grizzled, rugged freedom fighter who used to be a member of the maestro's orchestra. No matter how he had escaped, he had survived, and at sunup he would be in New Jersey, she promised.

"All's well that ends well." She realized he did not hear. Still she spoke on, then broke into soft laughter. His papery hand was on her bosom, stroking it, fumbling with a button. Ah, those Hungarians . . . They never said die . . . "Can't you go to sleep, dearie?" But she did not remove his hand. She let him explore a while. No one would know.

He did not know. He might well be asleep, dreaming, with his eyes opened wide to the Milky Way, his hand between the full round breasts. The plane was gliding evenly, steering a western course above the ocean. But he was whirling east through the Russian winter. He was on a sleigh ride, en route to St. Petersburg to play for the czar, with two of his buxom Valkyries under the fur rug. The flying stars, the flying snow: he remembered the kisses as the wolves had barked from an icy distance under the bloated moon—how long ago? But it might be this night, this moment—the coursing of his blood and then the calm, the long unbounded calm, the music of silence.

Snow

by TED HUGHES

And let me repeat this over and over again: beneath my feet is the earth, some part of the surface of the earth. Beneath the snow beneath my feet, that is. What else could it be? It is firm, I presume, and level. If it is not actually soil and rock, it must be ice. It is very probably ice. Whichever it may be, it is proof—the most substantial proof possible—that I am somewhere on the earth, the known earth. It would be absurd to dig down through the snow, just to determine exactly what is underneath, earth or ice. This bedded snow may well be dozens of feet deep. Besides, the snow filling all the air and rivering along the ground would pour into the hole as fast as I could dig, and cover me too—very quickly.

This could be no other planet: the air is perfectly natural, perfectly good.

Our aircraft was forced down by this unusual storm. The pilot tried to make a landing, but misjudged the extraordinary power of the wind and the whereabouts of the ground. The crash was violent. The fuselage buckled and gaped, and I was flung clear. Unconscious of everything save the need to get away from the disaster, I walked farther off into the blizzard and collapsed, which explains why, when I came to full consciousness and stood up out of the snow that was burying me, I could see nothing of either the aircraft or my fellow passengers. All around me was what I have been looking at ever since. The bottomless dense motion of snow. I started to walk.

Of course, everything previous to that first waking may have been entirely different since I don't remember a thing about it. Whatever chance dropped me here in the snow evidently destroyed my memory. That's one thing of which there is no doubt whatsoever. It is, so to speak, one of my facts. The aircraft crash is a working hypothesis, that merely.

There's no reason why I should not last quite a long time yet. I seem to have an uncommon reserve of energy. To keep my mind firm, that is the essential thing, to fix it firmly in my reasonable hopes, and lull it there, encourage it. Mesmerize it slightly with a sort of continuous prayer. Because when my mind is firm, my energy is firm. And that's the main thing here—energy. No matter how circumspect I may be, or how lucid, without energy I am lost on the spot. Useless to think about it. Where my energy ends I end, and all circumspection and all lucidity end with me. As long as I have energy I can correct my mistakes, outlast them, outwalk them—for instance the unimaginable error that as far as I know I am making at this very moment. This step, this, the next five hundred, or five thousand—all mistaken, all absolute waste, back to where I was ten years ago. But we recognize that thought. My mind is not my friend. My support, my defense, but my enemy too—not perfectly intent on getting me out of this. If I were mindless perhaps there would be no difficulty whatsoever. I would simply go on aware of nothing but my step by step success in getting over the ground. The thing to do is to keep alert, keep my mind fixed in alertness, recognize these treacherous, paralyzing, yes, lethal thoughts the second they enter, catch them before they can make that burrowing plunge down the spinal cord.

Then gently and without any other acknowledgment push them back—out into the snow where they belong. And that *is* where they belong. They are the infiltrations of the snow, encroachments of this immensity of lifelessness. But they enter so slyly! We are true, they say, or at least very probably true, and on that account you must entertain us and even give us the run of your life, since above all things you are dedicated to the truth. That is the air they have, that's how they come in.

What do I know about the truth? As if simple-minded dedications to truth were the final law of existence! I only know more and more clearly what is good for me. It's my mind that has this contemptible awe for the probably true, and my mind, I know, I prove it every minute, is not me and is by no means sworn to help me. Am I a lie? I must survive—that's a truth sacred as any; and as the hungry truths devour the sleepy truths, I shall digest every other possible truth to the substance and health and energy of my own; and the ones I can't digest I shall spit out, since in this situation my intention to survive is the one mouth, the one digestive tract, so to speak, by which I live. But those others! I relax for a moment, I leave my mind to itself for a moment—and they are in complete possession. They plunge into me, exultantly, mercilessly. There is no question of their intention or their power. Five seconds of carelessness, and they have struck. The strength melts from me, my bowels turn to water, my consciousness darkens and shrinks, I have to stop.

What are my facts? I do have some definite facts.

Taking six steps every five seconds, I calculate—allowing for my brief regular sleeps—that I have been walking through this blizzard for five months and during that time have covered something equal to the breadth of the Atlantic between Southampton and New York. Two facts. And a third: throughout those five months this twilight of snow has not grown either darker or brighter.

So.

There seems no reason to doubt that I am somewhere within either the Arctic or the Antarctic Circle. That's a comfort. It means my chances of survival are not uniquely bad. Men have walked the length of Asia simply to amuse themselves.

Obviously I am not traveling in a straight line. But that needn't give me any anxiety. Perhaps I made a mistake when I first started walking, setting my face against the wind instead of downwind. Coming against the wind I waste precious energy and there is always this wearisome snow blocking my eyes and mouth. But I had to trust the wind. This resignation to the wind's guidance is the very foundation of my firmness of mind. The wind is not simply my compass. In fact, I must not think of it as a compass at all. The wind is my law. As a compass nothing could be more useless.

No need to dwell on that. It's extremely probable indeed and something I need not hide from myself that this wind is leading me to and fro in quite a tight little maze—always shifting too stealthily for me to notice the change. Or, if the sun is circling the horizon, it seems likely that the wind is swinging with it through the three-hundred-and-sixty degrees once in every twenty-four hours, turning me as I keep my face against it in a perfect circle not more than seven miles across. This would explain the otherwise strange fact that in spite of the vast distance I have covered the terrain is still dead level, exactly as when I started. A frozen lake, no doubt. This is a strong possibility and I must get used to it without letting it overwhelm me, and without losing sight of its real advantages.

The temptation to trust to luck and instinct and cut out across wind is to be restricted. The effect on my system of confidence would be disastrous. My own judgment would naturally lead me in a circle. I would have to make deliberate changes of direction to break out of that circle—only to go in a larger circle or a circle in the opposite direction. So more changes. Wilder and more sudden changes, changes of my changes—all to evade an enemy that showed so little sign of itself it might as well not have existed. It's clear where all that would end. Shouting and running and so on. Staggering round like a man beset by a mob. Falling, grovelling. So on. The snow.

No. All I have to do is endure: that is, keep my face to the wind. My face to the wind, a firm grip on my mind, and everything else follows naturally. There is not the slightest need to be anxious. Any time now the Polar night will arrive, bringing a drastic change of climate—inevitable. Clearing the sky and revealing the faultless compass of the stars.

The facts are overwhelmingly on my side. I could almost believe in Providence. After all, if one single circumstance were slightly—only slightly—other than it is! If, for instance, instead of waking in a blizzard on a firm level place, I had come to consciousness falling endlessly through snow cloud. Then I might have wondered very seriously whether I were in the gulf or not. Or if the atmosphere happened to consist of, say, ammonia. I could not have existed. And in the moment before death by asphyxiation I would certainly have been convinced I was out on some lifeless planet. Or if I had no body but simply arms and legs growing out of a head, my whole system of confidence would have been disoriented from the start. My dreams, for instance, would have been meaningless to me, or rather an argument of my own meaninglessness. I would have died almost immediately, out of sheer bewilderment. It wouldn't need nearly such extreme differences either. If I had been without these excellent pigskin boots, trousers, jacket, gloves and hood, the cold would have extinguished me at once.

And even if I had double the clothing that I have, where would I be without my chair? My chair is quite as important as one of my lungs. As both my lungs, indeed, for without it I should be dead. Where would I have slept? Lying in the snow. But lying flat, as I have discovered, I am buried by the snow in just under a minute, and the cold begins to take over my hands and my feet and my face. Sleep would be impossible. In other words, I would very soon collapse of exhaustion and be buried. As it is, I unsnap my chair harness, plant the chair in the snow, sit on it, set my feet on the rung between the front legs, my arms folded over my knees and my head resting on my arms, and am able in this way to take a sleep of fully ten minutes before the snow piles over me.

The chain of providential coincidences is endless. Or rather, like a chain mail, it is complete without one missing link to betray and annul the rest. Even my dreams are part of it. They are as tough and essential a link as any, since there can no longer be any doubt that they are an accurate reproduction of my whole previous life, of the world as it is and as I knew it—all without one contradictory detail. Yet if my amnesia had been only a little bit stronger!—it needed only that. Because without this evidence of the world and my identity I could have known no purpose in continuing the ordeal. I could only have looked, breathed and died, like a nestling fallen from the nest.

Everything fits together. And the result—my survival, and my determination to survive. I should rejoice.

The chair is of conventional type: nothing in the least mystifying about it. A farmhouse sort of chair: perfectly of a piece with my dreams, as indeed are my clothes, my body and all the inclinations of my mind. It is of wood, painted black, though in places showing a coat of brown beneath the black. One of the nine struts in the back is missing and some child—I suppose it was a child—has stuck a dab of chewing gum into the empty socket. Obviously the chair has been well used, and not too carefully. The right foreleg has been badly chewed, evidently by a puppy, and on the seat both black and brown paints are wearing through showing the dark grain of the pale wood. If all this is not final evidence of a reality beyond my own, of the reality of the world it comes from, the world I re-dream in my sleeps—I might as well lie down in the snow and be done with.

The curious harness needn't worry me. The world, so far as I've dreamed it at this point, contains no such harness, true. But since I've not yet dreamed anything from after my twenty-sixth birthday, the harness might well have been invented between that time and the time of my disaster. Probably it's now in general use. Or it may be the paraphernalia of some fashionable game that came in during my twenty-seventh or later year, and to which I got addicted. Sitting on snow peaks in nineteenth-century chairs. Or perhaps I developed a passion for painting polar scenery and along with that a passion for this particular chair as my painting seat, and had the harness designed specially. A lucky eccentricity! It is perfectly adapted to my present need.

But all that's in the dark still. There's a lot I haven't dreamed yet. From my twenty-third and twenty-fourth years I have almost nothing—a few insignificant episodes. Nothing at all after my twenty-sixth birthday. The rest, though, is about complete, which suggests that any time now I ought to be getting my twenty-third and twenty-fourth years in full and, more important, my twenty-seventh year, or as much of it as there is, along with the accurate account of my disaster and the origin of my chair.

There seems little doubt of my age. Had I been dreaming my life chronologically there would have been real cause for worry. I could have had no idea how much was still to come. Of course, if I were suddenly to dream something from the middle of my sixtieth year I would have to reorganize all my ideas. What really convinces me of my youth is my energy. The appearance of my body tells me nothing. Indeed, from my hands and feet—which are all I have dared to uncover—one could believe I was several hundred years old, or even dead, they are so black and shrunken on the bone. But the emaciation is understandable, considering that for five months I have been living exclusively on will power, without the slightest desire for food.

I have my job to get back to, and my mother and father will be in despair. And God knows what will have happened to Helen. Did I marry her? I have no wedding ring. But we were engaged. And it is another confirmation of my youth that my feelings for her are as they were then—stronger, in fact, yes a good deal stronger, though speaking impartially these feelings that seem to be for her might easily be nothing but my desperate longing to get back to the world in general—a longing that is using my onetime affection for Helen as a sort of form or model. It's possible, very possible, that I have in reality forgotten her, even that I am sixty years old, that she has been dead for thirty-four years. Certain things may be very different from what I imagine. If I were to take this drift of thoughts to the logical extreme there is no absolute proof that my job, my parents, Helen and the whole world are not simply my own invention, fantasies my imagination has improvised on the simple themes of my own form, of clothes, my chair, and the properties of my present environment. I am in no position to be sure about anything.

But there is more to existence, fortunately, than consideration of possibilities. There is conviction, faith. If there were not, where would I be? The moment I allow one of these "possibilities" the slightest intimacy—a huge futility grips me, as it were physically, by the heart, as if the organ itself were despairing of this life and ready to give up.

Courageous and calm. That should be my prayer. I should repeat that, repeat it like the Buddhists with their "O jewel of the lotus." Repeat it till it repeats itself in my very heart, till every heartbeat drives it through my whole body. Courageous and calm. This is the world, think no more about it.

My chair will keep me sane. My chair, my chair, my chair—I might almost repeat that. I know every mark on it, every grain. So near and true! It alone predicates a Universe, the entire Universe, with its tough carpentering, its sprightly, shapely design—so delicate, so strong.

And while I have the game I need be afraid of nothing. Though it is dangerous. Tempting, dangerous, but—it is enough to know that the joy is mine. I set the chair down in the snow, letting myself think I am going to sleep, but instead of sitting I step back a few paces into the snow. How did I think of that? The first time, I did not dare look away from it. I had never before let it out of my hand, never let it go for a fraction between unbuckling it and sitting down on it. But then I let it go and stepped back into the snow. I had never heard my voice before. I was astonished at the sound that struggled up out of me. Well, I need the compensations. And this game does rouse my energies, so it is, in a sense, quite practical. After the game, I could run. That's the moment of danger, though, the moment of overpowering impatience when I could easily lose control and break out, follow my instinct, throw myself on luck, run out across the wind.

But there is a worse danger. If I ran out across the wind I would pretty soon come to my senses, turn my face back into the wind. It is the game itself, the stage of development it has reached, that is dangerous now. I no longer simply step back. I set the chair down, turn my face away and walk off into the blizzard, counting my steps carefully. At fourteen paces I stop. Fifteen is the limit of vision in this dense flow of snow, so at fourteen I stop, and turn.

Let those be the rules. Let me fix the game at that. Because at first I see nothing. That should be enough for me. Everywhere, pouring silent gray, a silence like a pressure, like the slow coming to bear of some incalculable pressure, too gradual to detect. If I were simply to stand there my mind would crack in a few moments. But I concentrate, I withdraw my awe from the emptiness and look pointedly into it. At first, everything is as usual—as I have seen it for five months. Then my heart begins to thump unnaturally, because I seem to make out a dimness, a shadow that wavers deep in the gray turmoil, vanishes and darkens, rises and falls. I step one pace forward and using all my will power stop again. The shadow is as it was. Another step. The shadow seems to be a little darker. Then it vanishes and I lunge two steps forward but immediately stop because there it is, quite definite, no longer moving. Slowly I walk toward it.

The rules are that I keep myself under control, that I restrain all sobs or shouts though of course it is impossible to keep the breathing regular—at this stage at least, and right up to the point where the shadow resolves into a chair. In that vast gray dissolution—my chair! The snowflakes are drifting against the legs and gliding between the struts, bumping against them, clinging and crawling over the seat. To control myself then is not within human power. Indeed I seem to more or less lose consciousness at that point. I'm certainly not responsible for the weeping, shouting thing that falls on my chair, embracing it, kissing it, bruising his cheeks against it. As the snowflakes tap and run over my gloves and over the chair I begin to call them names. I peer into each one as if it were a living face, full of speechless recognition, and I call to them—Willy, Joanna, Peter, Jesus, Ferdinand, anything that comes into my head, and shout to them and nod and laugh. Well, it's harmless enough madness.

The temptation to go beyond the fourteen paces is now becoming painful. To go deep into the blizzard. Forty paces. Then come back, peering. Fifteen paces, twenty paces. Stop. A shadow.

That would not be harmless madness. If I were to leave my chair like that the chances are I would never find it again. My footprints do not exist in this undertow of snow. Weeks later, I would still be searching, casting in great circles, straining at every moment to pry a shadow out of the gray sameness. My chair meanwhile a hundred miles away in the blizzard, motionless—neat legs and elegant back, sometimes buried, sometimes uncovering again. And for centuries, long after I'm finished, still sitting there, intact with its tooth-marks and missing strut, waiting for a darkening shape to come up out of the nothingness and shout to it and fall on it and possess it.

But my chair is here, on my back, here. There's no danger of my ever losing it. Never so long as I keep control, keep my mind firm. All the facts are on my side. I have nothing to do but endure.

The Stroller in the Air

by EUGENE IONESCO

"Now that you've given up the theatre, I take it that you'll give up the cinema too?"

I was finishing a book, that summer, in England. I had taken a little prefabricated house in Gloucestershire. It stood in the middle of a meadow in the green uplands above a valley. Down in the valley, between two wooded hills, there was a river, small but navigable. One day I had a letter from a young journalist whose questions I had promised to answer, and one of them was the question quoted above. I couldn't make head or tail of it. *"En abandonnant le théâtre, ne pensâtes-vous ne plus devoir écrire pour le cinéma?"* Well, it was true that I had 'given up the theatre' a year or two before. I had been tried beyond endurance by the ill-nature of certain critics and the persistent blindness of others. But I had gone on writing dialogue and screen plays for the cinema.

I went over the question again. Why on earth should I give up the cinema, just because I had given up the theatre? What were these pseudo problems, and why should I bother my conscience with them? Who stood to benefit by it? Did someone want to close my mouth, and prevent me expressing myself? I was enough of a worrier by nature without having new anxieties put in my way.

The question was not well put, in any case, and the phrasing seemed obscure. Was it really a piece of treachery to write for the cinema, in those conditions? That was what the little reporter seemed to be insinuating. It was too idiotic.

I was rereading it for the twentieth or thirtieth time when suddenly I realized what had happened. My interrogator had left out one little three-letter word: *que.* What he had meant to say was: *"En abandonnant le théâtre ne pensâtes-vous ne plus devoir écrire que pour le cinéma?"* "Now that you've given up the theatre, I take it that you'll be writing *exclusively for* the cinema?" That would make perfect sense; for it was quite possible that once I took to writing for the cinema I should no longer be able to carry on with any other form of writing. The cinema takes all one's time and energy, as those who have worked for it well know. Besides, the cinema pays very well indeed. Why should one bust oneself writing novels and essays that nobody's going to buy?

This simple typing error—due, no doubt, to excessive haste—had caused me unnecessary disquiet. Luckily it was not more than a slip, for I very much dislike being accused of opportunism, self-satisfaction, cupidity or bad faith. I like to live in comfort, but without extravagance, and without having to compromise for money's sake. I am quite capable of withdrawing from ventures that would bring in a great deal of money if I feel that my honor requires it: that was what had happened in the theatre. But had I set too much store by the critics? Possibly . . .

I got up, as if to change the subject, and looked out of my window. My meadow view had some white houses in the distance, and a steep descent to the right. Thinking how pleasant it would be to tread that green, green grass under the blue, blue sky of a June morning in England, I decided to go for a walk. But just as I reached the door a German bomber—the last survivor, no doubt, of the war of 1939-45—dropped a bomb that fell slap in the middle of my roof. The house went up in smoke. It was a miracle that I wasn't hurt.

Out in the meadow, my wife and daughter were waiting for me, surveying the landscape, the distant town, the croquet-playing children in their red and white Sunday suits, and the valley stretched out at their feet. They had come down from London, as they always did on Sundays, to see how I was getting on in my working retreat.

"But it's enormous, your meadow!" said my wife. "And what marvelous weather you have here!"

"Didn't you see what just happened?" I said.

"You can't say I didn't warn you. You ought to have taken more care."

I was really rather irritated. "It's not my fault," I said. "What could I have done about it?"

"You could have taken a proper house, not that little cardboard thing that can't stand up even to the littlest bomb. It's so bad for your notebooks."

"Look how pretty Mama's hat is," said my daughter.

My wife had on a little pink hat that suited her very well, a sky blue coat and skirt, more or less in the classic style, with a rose pinned to the lapel. She also had a black leather handbag that was out of key with the rest. I pointed this out.

"I can't buy everything all at once," she said. "I can't afford it. But I did see a beautiful bag in a shop window in Piccadilly. It was light in color—I can't describe just the shade—and it had flowers that moved. They opened and shut just like real ones. Perhaps they were real flowers? Or perhaps they worked like a fan?"

My daughter had on her Sunday dress, with white shoes. The light in her green and gray eyes had that invariable softness and sweetness, that childlike softness and sweetness that contrasted a little with the severity of her profile. I embraced them both, and took them by the hand, as we all went to sit on the bench that looked across the ravine.

"How much light there is here today!" I said. "How much light there is!" Down below, on the track that ran parallel to the little river, a train was passing, a tiny little train with its red locomotive and its shrill little cries that came to us from far, far down below. It was the kind of train I had longed to have for myself, as a child. Today's children, and tomorrow's, will have no use for it. Rockets are all that *they* want. Toys go out of fashion, too—more and more of them: academic toys, they've become, toys for the archives. Only the elderly scholar will find them amusing and even he will need some misleading historical interpretation to get the point of them.

"You know I had a most disturbing dream last night." It was my wife speaking. "My father was alive. He'd come back to life, I mean. He'd only just died. . . . No, that's not how it was. He was thought to have died, but actually he hadn't. After the undertaker had been sent for my father was found to be still alive, and quite young, with all his hair and his big forehead. He was just a bit thin, because he'd come back from the war. His brother the doctor, my uncle, had come in a moment or two before to prepare us for the shock. For happiness can be killing, you know, if it's too intense and comes as too much of a surprise. The only tiresome thing was that we'd have to ring up the undertaker and cancel the funeral. They'd be very annoyed, of course. Such a thing had never happened before. They'd sue us for damages, and for interest on capital, beyond a doubt, and it would be in all the papers, quite probably: it was terribly annoying. What would people think of us? Could we avoid a court case, at any rate? 'We must get a lawyer,' said my uncle, taking care not to look my father in the eye. 'There's no precedent in commercial law for a case of this sort. It'll have to go before a judge.'" My wife turned toward me: "What do you say to that, for a dream?"

"It's a dream, just a dream: nothing more. It simply means that you were very fond of your father, that you wish he was still alive, but that you realize that his return to life would lead to certain difficulties, all the same. Don't start worrying about dreams—just look at this beautiful grass, at those woods on the other side of the valley, and then turn round and look at the white walls of those houses on the outskirts of the town and see how they seem to dissolve in the light. Look up at the sky! Be content with the light!"

Just at that moment a man passed by. He was dressed in the old-fashioned style and had white side-whiskers. He almost bumped into us in order to get past, and he didn't even say "Sorry!"—a rare omission, for an Englishman. My daughter was quite put out: "What manners!" she said. "Did you see that man?"

"What man?" said my wife. She hadn't seen him. And although my daughter and I assured her that he had really gone by, and had almost bumped into us, and that he was smoking a pipe, and that the smoke was going downwards instead of upwards, she said that it was a hallucination on our part.

"Yes and no," was what I said. "Yes and no," for the man had suddenly disappeared above the valley, as if he had melted into the air.

"He's fallen down," said my daughter.

"Not at all. 'Fallen' is a figure of speech. He's just gone on his way. We can no longer follow him. He is not one of us, although he's near to us. He is a member of the anti-world, who has passed through to the other side of the invisible and yet not transparent wall which divides that world from ours. I see him from time to time, in the morning. He must take his walk every day at the same hour, no doubt at some point where there's a break in the anti-world, a defect of some kind, a hole through which we can see him without his knowing it, a no-man's-land, a between-world. He certainly can't see us—that's why he didn't excuse himself for having nearly bumped into us. In any case, we can't really consider him as existing on the same plane as ourselves. His existence is relative, at most."

"What is the anti-world?" my daughter asked.

I tried to explain that there are an indeterminable number of universes. "Each of these overlaps and is interlocked with each of the others, and yet none of them interferes with the working of the others. They can lie one above the other, and they can even penetrate one another, without touching. They can even co-exist in an identical space. It's difficult to imagine but that's how it is. The glimpse that we've had of an inhabitant of one of these other worlds was a quite exceptional happening, and one that must be attributed to faulty shunting or signaling of some sort. It is on record that in Ireland, and in the islands of the Scottish coast, mirrors reflect, thanks to some as yet undefined property, silhouettes and countrysides which do not belong to the world as we know it. A certain quality in the air or the water is doubtless responsible; for if these same mirrors are taken to America, or Belgium, or merely on board a vessel flying the French flag, those images cease to appear. For a more exact account of all this, the student must address himself to a man of science. I've told you all I can," I said to my daughter. "And, anyway, the man who passed by just now is totally and inconceivably different from what we saw of him. What is he really like? And even if he did live in the universe which was most like our own, his hair would really be black, and not white, because what we could see of him corresponded to the negative of a photograph. If he seemed old to us, then very probably he's young. And what does 'really' mean, anyway? Let's stick to our own world," I said to my daughter. "You're not old enough to understand all that. Let's not ask too many questions. Sunday's not the day for philosophy."

But my daughter has a passion for learning. "Is that man what people call a ghost?"

"It's popularly believed," I said, "that when people die they pass into the anti-world. Certain facts appear to confirm this belief. When someone dies and is put into a coffin, his corpse disappears. That's why coffins weigh so little. What becomes of the body? There are no such things as ghosts. People who die get inlaid once and for all—of course that's again a figure of speech—into the anti-world. They have anti-heads, anti-limbs, anti-clothes, anti-feelings. It's pure chance if you happen to see them, as we saw the man, or pseudo man, who passed by just now. There are no ghosts, but there may be people who pass by, or pass back and forth, across a small part of our own universe. We ourselves may pass by in theirs. We are not conscious of it. And how do we look to them?"

"Those passers-by are simply phantoms, born of the winds' trickery," said my wife.

"Not at all! Not at all! There *is* a negative of our universe. Of that, there are proofs: or rather, indications, or verbal proofs. The word 'topsy-turvy' comes from that, though most people don't realize it. One might get some vague idea of topsy-turvydom through seeing the towers of a castle reflected in its moat, or a fly walking upside down on the ceiling, or handwriting that runs from right to left and from bottom to top of the page. Or an anagram, a juggler, an acrobat, or the sunlight as it is refracted, broken up, disintegrated into color-dust as it passes through a prism of crystal only to reconstitute itself, a yard or two further on, on a wall, or on a screen, or on a face, once again bright and clear and transparent and unified . . . and upside down. Luckily the center of our world never bumps into the center of the anti-world. For if that were to happen there'd be mutual disintegration and annihilation. Some pessimists think that annihilation of all universes would result. Perhaps that's how it will end, and the whole thing will have to begin again from the beginning."

My wife looked at me, and reproached me, in the nicest way, for drinking too much. It stopped me from working—or so she said. "It did inspire me, at least," I replied, "to the sham literature of which I have just given you an example."

"Leave him alone," said my daughter. "Leave him alone. Surely he can do what he likes?"

"Instead of talking all round the point," said my wife, "why don't you come and walk in the grass with us? The grass will freshen your ideas."

I joined hands with the two dear beings who stood one on either side of me. My daughter is already taller than her mother. We often tease my wife about her tiny stature.

We must have made an amusing picture as we turned our backs on the white houses of the town and slowly ambled along the path beside the top of the steep descent.

To our right were some fragmentary ruins. Pink, they were, and flower-strewn, and gay: a column and some arcades, all shaky and tottery as if they were learning how to stand up again. Behind, my house had vanished. Even the debris was no longer there: sucked skywards, no doubt, by the pumps of Nothingness.

We all need, of course, to give our concepts a palpable image, and I had always imagined Nothingness as a sort of little ditch, or as the hollowed-out black section of a dice; but the capacity of that ditch, or that part of the dice, was vastly greater than that of the immeasurably larger boxes or spaces which exist in the world as we know it.

I went on with my thoughts: those bygone palaces to which the ruins bore witness were gone for ever—not a doubt of that. But just possibly they will be rebuilt and restored on the other side, after traversing Nothingness? Nothingness since it has no dimensions is smaller than Smallness itself. Yes, perhaps they have been rebuilt on the other side: upside-down, of course, since we are speaking of the other side. Their reconstruction may have already begun. The stones left behind here must feel it—that's why they have such a triumphant look, despite their provisional deterioration. The frontiers of Nothingness are imperceptible and it's easy to step over them without knowing it. The amazing thing is that there are people who imagine it as an enormous emptiness, a black, unfathomable void! For Nothingness is neither black nor white, and if it were 'unfathomable' it would need a really unlimited amount of room.

"Where are you, my dear?" said my wife. "In Nothingness? Or in the Hereafter? I keep talking to you, and I never get an answer."

"How is it that you can guess even my most secret thoughts?"

"I was listening to you. *I* pay attention, even if you don't."

"And yet I wasn't thinking aloud. I didn't even move my lips."

"We only need to look at you to guess what you're thinking," said my daughter. "We only need to look at you—your face gives you away. You ought to have been a film actor, or a mime, or an impersonator."

I might have got irritated. But my daughter was holding a big bunch of daisies, fresh-picked and all aquiver, in her arms, and when she put one in my buttonhole I was won over at once. I can never resist an affectionate impulse.

As we went on our way, a feeling of complete relaxation came over us. I felt within myself the beginnings of a felicity beyond description. It was bliss of the kind that one forgets about, and yet knows perfectly well; that one remembers exactly, when one is reminded of it; that comes back to one like something that belongs to one for all eternity; that is lost every day and yet never lost at all. Happiness of this kind is physical, concrete, localized. You can situate it exactly, between the solar plexus, where it begins, and the shoulders, where it climbs to after filling the lungs with an air more subtle than air itself. Its vapors rise into your mouth, pass through your nostrils, arrive at the brain. It's an intoxication born of the gods. You feel drunk with the sheer certainty of it.

"What certainty?" said my wife.

"Certainty," I replied. "Certainty. I don't know *what* certainty."

"Then it can't be certainty. It's an uncertain, an undefined certainty. The characteristic of certainty is precision."

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, certainty to which limits can be set is not certainty at all, because there are boundaries to it, and because it is menaced by what runs counter to it. And besides, nothing is more imprecise than precision. What does that mean?"

"You have a language all your own, and no one else can understand it. What else?"

"I understand it," said our daughter.

"Well, so much the worse for you," said my wife.

Suddenly I realized why I was so happy, and why, from that same happiness, I felt weightless and, without noticing it, had broken into a run. Going a little out of our way, I came upon the silver bridge: dazzling in the sun, it spanned the abyss, linking one side with the other, a great single-arched aerial structure that seemed to hang in the air high above the river, above the railway lines that ran beside the river, above the boats, above the houses, above the trees, above the sloping hills, above the terminus of the track-railway and the funicular, riding easily among the summits of the upper air.

"Where are you going? Wait for us!" my wife cried.

And then when they too saw the bridge my two dear little women cried out in their turn, in amazement and incredulity and delight: "Goodness, how beautiful!"

They came beside me, and I took them by the shoulders, and we looked our fill. The silver arch reflected and multiplied the sun's rays and the glare of the sky.

There were some English families there too, in their Sunday best, and they too were looking in wonder at the bridge. They could see it every day, of course, but they only looked at it on Sundays. That's always the way. In France, no one would ever have looked at it, though the French have no equals when it comes to standing and staring. In America, too, they have enormous bridges; but the Americans go across them with their eyes shut. (That's why they have so many accidents.) In Australia they have them, too, and in Russia. But no one sees them, because they are not interested in the bridges, but merely in what they are used for. For this reason, there is no longer such a thing as a bridge. Only what is not a bridge still exists. Once you know what a thing is for, you destroy it.

"How d'you mean, destroy it?" said my wife, in irony, though she was touched by the beauty of the bridge. Her eyes remained sharp, even at moments of astonishment. We went over and joined the English families, just by the arch, where the little motor cars were belting along as fast as they could, with the light bounding off their side windows and coming back at us in thousand upon thousand of multi-colored fragments, like the sparkling facets of auto-mobile diamonds.

"There you are," I said to my daughter. "As you're learning physics now you must recognize those—they are the celebrated luminous particles that scientists call photons."

"Really?"

"You'll make her more of a goose than she is already. She's taking you seriously."

"Oh, no, Mama! I know quite well that he's joking."

"And when isn't he joking?" Turning toward me, this time. "I prefer it when you're joking, actually. When you're not, it means that you're sad."

"Are you often sad? Why does it happen? What makes you sad?" asked my compassionate daughter. "It makes me sad that you should be sad," she went on, taking my hand and stroking it.

"I am sad when I think that the years go by like sacks that we mark 'Returned Empty,' sad when I think that we shall be separated from one another and from ourselves. But that sadness is just the bottom of the wave. Today I feel buoyed up by happiness, carried high by my joy. . . ."

And, in saying this, I began to hop and skip, working my arms wildly as if they had been wings.

"Steady on!" said my wife, as she took out a pocket mirror to keep herself in countenance. "Steady on, now! People are looking."

Several groups of English people had, in effect, been studying my behavior—not disapprovingly, but with a tranquil amazement, though they clearly thought that my exuberance smacked too much of the South for their latitudes.

I could not contain my wild gaiety. It overflowed, swept me away, lifted me right off the ground. I noticed that my feet had left the ground; the soles of my shoes skimmed the topmost tufts of grass.

The English hadn't realized this, as yet. As far as they were concerned I was simply walking faster—or, since I looked as if I was slithering along, I was imitating a skier or a skater. They might also have thought that I had put on an inch or two. But as I am of average height, and they are mostly rather tall, another inch or so on my part would not have added up to anything unusual.

But my daughter said: "That's funny—Papa's left the ground!"

"You must be mad," said my wife.

And then, as I went a little higher, she could see in her hand mirror the gap, now still wider, between my feet and the grass. She had to admit that my daughter was right.

"Now really, Herbert, what d'you think you're doing?" she said. "You simply can't behave like that in public!"

(She always gives me that name when she sees me doing things that she doesn't approve of.)

I was like a river in flood. I was drowning in my own happiness, and buoyed up by it at the same time. In actual fact I was walking on air; but I might equally well have been treading the sea-bed, for the air that morning had the density of water and the blue sky was deep as the ocean.

I had suddenly rediscovered how to fly. How could I ever have forgotten it? It was so simple. Any child could do it. Flying is an act indispensable to mankind, a function as natural as breathing. The fact is that everyone can fly, must fly, knows how to fly. It's an innate faculty. Yet everyone forgets it. That's why we feel unhappy. It's worse than if we were deprived of food. Most of the time, not only do people no longer know how to fly, but they don't know that it's the fact of not flying that makes them unhappy. They feel their misfortune, but they can't identify it. Whence our wretchedness. What would people say if we forgot how to swim, or how to walk? Or how to stand up, quite simply? Or how to sit down? We must relearn our takeoff. Or rather: we must remember it. I myself, for most of the time, and like most of us, don't know how to leave the ground. But at least I know that it's vital for me to do it, and I know what it is that's wrong when I suffer for the lack of it. People may argue that we have invented the airplane, the rocket, and the satellite for that very reason: because humanity knows that flying is a part of its nature and has tried to reincorporate it. But does the paralytic walk in his wheelchair? Not at all. He has to be pushed. That has nothing to do with walking. Does the motorist walk? No: he rolls along, shut up in his box. The aviator doesn't *fly*, any more than the paralytic flies in his wheelchair or the motorist in his car. There are now in existence individual flying kits that you wrap round yourself like lifebelts, and with these you can jump, like a locust, over roads and gardens and rivers and coppices and bungalows. But as for taking off into the upper air—why, this apparatus is not even as much use as is the motorized bicycle to the man who wants to climb a mountain.

No, we must fly naturally, as we once did. It's nothing more than a habit we've got to get back into. Maybe it's simply from laziness that we've lost the habit of flying, and the feeling for it. If we have to have motors to help us fly, it's no longer natural. People call it 'progress,' but there's nothing progressive about walking with crutches. Soon we shall forget how to walk, too, if we don't look out. It's easy enough to see that things are already going that way. We're losing all our powers. What have we got on the roads? Nothing but motor cars. Pedestrians are a rarity; the few that remain are objects of contempt. Before long they will have disappeared. But I want to go on being a man who walks on the road and a man who walks in the air. I want to walk on the grass, and I want to walk in the air as well: and for neither of them do I want any mechanical devices.

"How d'you do it? Do show me," said my daughter.

"He won't be able to go any higher," said my wife.

"Oh yes, I can," I said. "Nothing is easier. You just have to will yourself to do it. The will is power. You must have confidence. If you lose confidence, you fall backwards—you go down again, rather. For the remarkable thing is that you never fall down abruptly, like a stone. That's one more proof that it's natural to fly. When you're flying freely above the topmost trees, above the lake, above the high plateau, you never feel afraid. But in an airplane, or in a ski lift, everyone is afraid from time to time. You can be astonished, certainly, to find yourself flying over mountain tops, over cathedrals, over roofs. And if you're astonished beyond a certain point, if you begin to think that there's something abnormal about your being able to stay up without wings and a propeller, then your confidence is shaken, and you begin to lose height, and you drop down, but no faster than a lift. Sometimes, by an effort of the will, you can regain height, and climb again, as if you had thrown overboard some ballast. But not for long. Even the most trifling failure of will can bring on the downward movement again. How many times have I not rediscovered the secret within myself and said to myself as I took off: 'Now it's for ever that I know it! I shall never forget, I shall never forget it, any more than I shall forget how to hear and how to see.' "

But I was going down, all the same, like a child's balloon as it gradually lets out the air.

But now I no longer forget. This time I shall pay the closest attention to it all. I shall memorize every movement of heart and body, put them all down in my notebook, and reproduce them whenever I want to.

I was suddenly seized with an irresistible longing to go and take the air, or rather to let the air take me: to fly over the valley and see what there was to be seen in the other valleys that lay beyond the hills opposite. My feet touched ground again, but so far from losing my momentum I could hardly keep myself from taking off into the upper air. I was like a horse that paws the ground in its impatience. I tapped the ground with my foot, very lightly—just enough to hoist me a foot or two into the air.

"How d'you do it?" my daughter was asking.

"It's very easy. I'll teach you. You'll see. It's a game. You know how to ride a bicycle, don't you? Well, a bicycle is only a machine. But as we've got into the habit of using machines we might as well learn what we can from them, by analogy. They have taken the place of the human being and his functions—it's for us to retrieve our true functions by way of these mechanical imitations. Imagine that you're on your bicycle. Look: move your legs as if you were starting to ride, as if you had invisible wheels to keep moving. Hold yourself upright, as if you were on the saddle, and keep your hands in front of you, as if they were on your handlebars. After you've got the pedals turning seven or eight times you'll feel yourself getting under way—first about as high as the chimney piece, and then higher and ever higher. You can ride a bicycle. Riding the air is the same thing—a matter of exactly the same balance. No difference at all. Just like this."

I did as I had told her to do. The English had formed a circle round me and were looking on.

"There's another procedure, a rather less mechanical one, for those who don't care for machines that climb, or roll on wheels, or fly, even if they are imaginary.

It's a gymnastic procedure, and one nearer to nature. You jump in the air, as high as you can, and you raise your arms at the same time. Instead of allowing yourself to fall back, you hold on to an imaginary branch, rather as if you were climbing a tree. You pull yourself up by your wrists and grab hold of another, higher branch. And so you climb from one imaginary branch to the next. You can climb as high as you like, because your imaginary tree goes on until you've had enough of it, or can't go on any more. It's even infinite in its height, if you want to go on for ever and have the strength to do so. The first stages are very hard going, and you'll get awfully tired. But the more you climb, the easier it becomes. A mysterious strength that pushes you upwards. You don't feel your weight at all. You need a hand to get going, and then a finger, and then the mere wish to go higher is enough. It bears out the expression: *'Vouloir, c'est pouvoir.'* "

But there's a danger in having too strong a will. You can end by destroying the natural resistance of the air to your ascent. Gravity capitulates: and you may disappear, carried away by that intoxication which characterizes extremes of height and depth.

In short, you must never take up arms against the forces of nature, and neither must you resist them.

"If you like," I said to my daughter, who was hesitating, and to my wife, who was terrified, "I can take you with me, each on one of my arms, if you don't want to fly by yourselves."

"Surely you won't take us by force!" said my wife. At that moment I stamped a little too hard on the ground and took off without really meaning to. Probably I was drawn upwards by some movement of the atmosphere, for I found myself climbing very quickly. Then, once in the calm waters of the upper air, I slowed up and began to move sideways, parallel to the arch, though high above it. I no longer needed to make any complicated movements; the smallest gesture of one hand or the other was enough. In silence I headed for the hill opposite; I had only to look in that direction to keep on my course.

I was at a great height, midway between the two hills, when I stopped to look around, searching the four corners of the horizon below me.

And I saw it. I saw everything. And I grieved to see it.

I was in despair. I thought to myself, "It can't be true. It can't." And then: "But *is*, though." I turned in on myself, like a top that is running down, and over and over again I said: "It just can't be possible. But I'm not making a mistake. I'm not dreaming. Those atrocities that I have just seen are real. They and they only are real." I could have stayed on up there as long as I liked. But what was the point, if disaster and only disaster is in store for us?

Slowly, sadly, I came down, as a man comes down an invisible staircase. I brushed against the top of a tree and pulled at a single leaf, without thinking. It spun round and round as it fell.

My wife, my daughter, and the others were waiting for me. I came down just over their heads, on to the grass, on to the firm ground.

"How did you manage it?"

"I flew."

"That's not true," said one of the Englishmen. "We saw what was happening. You were walking on an invisible arch. That was what kept you up. It was invisible because it's simply solidified air. Anyone could do what you did. You'd just have to show them where the arch starts from."

"There is no other arch. I was flying, I really was. That's all there was to it."

"Anyway there's nothing extraordinary about what you did. It's no more than a kite does. As for ourselves, we can cross the valley in a few seconds—by car, by airplane, by rocket—where it took you a good twenty minutes to get across. It's too long, your flying—it takes too much time. It's not a system we could put money into."

"What's the matter?" said my wife. "You ought to be proud of yourself. You look a bit down in the mouth—what did you see on the other side?"

"At the foot of the hill facing us, on the other side of the valley, there's a big gateway, and on it is written 'PARADISE' in big letters, all lit up, like the ones at Battersea Fun Fair. Behind the gates, and open to the sky, is hell. Giant grasshoppers were nibbling at the severed skulls of those who had been imprudent enough to go in, and their headless trunks were being fitted with the heads of foxes, monkeys and geese. Farther on, sows were in control. I climbed higher to see what was going on at other points of importance, and when I got near to the invisible rooftop where space and time meet—near enough to be able to touch it with my forehead—I looked to right and to left, in front of me and to the rear. Gigantic bombs were being pulled hither and thither, cutting deep as they went into flatlands long since ravaged and left empty. Where they came from, and who was in charge of them, I have no idea. And beyond there was nothing but ice, and fire beyond the ice, a desert of ice and a desert of fire, each fighting desperately to dominate the other as they moved steadily toward us."

"Tell that to these people, tell them what you saw."

"No one would believe me. And even if they did . . ."

"Then what are you waiting for? Take us each under your arm, now that you've proved that you can fly."

"Where would we go?"

"Take us away, as far as you can, farther than the hell you spoke of."

"Alas, my darlings, I can't. Beyond that hell, there is nothing."

"What do you mean—nothing?"

"Nothing. Just one bottomless abyss after another."

With heads bowed, and fear and desolation in our hearts, we walked on toward the town. The light was beginning to fade. We heard one or two loud explosions, and the sky glowed red for a moment. It was nothing, as yet—just a fête, a sort of English 14th of July.

—Translated from the French by John Russell

Dancer's Cricket

by CALVIN KENTFIELD

The *Tiger,* an aging tanker whose home—if such a vagrant ship could be said to have a home—was Texas, shuttled for months and months fetching and carrying black oil from the Persian Gulf to England. Liverpool, the port of discharge, was the only port the crew, who had signed a year's articles, could go ashore in, and then only for a few hours. Each round trip took forty-two days.

After three such voyages winter came to the north, but the *Tiger's* men fortunately gained a respite from both the weather and the sooty jungles of Liverpool when the vessel paused in Suez for stores and fuel, and George Dancer, master of the *Tiger,* received orders to discharge his fourth cargo in the South of France at Berre.

It was cold when the *Tiger* arrived there, but the sun shone and the air was clean and blue. Though it was only for one trip, this change lifted Captain Dancer's spirits. He authorized the purchase, as part of the ship's stores, of sixty-four bottles of ordinary wine—three cases of red and three of white—for the Christmas feast which would take place, according to rough calculations, off the southern coast of Arabia during the return voyage from Kuwait.

Out of his own commodious pocket he bought a case of Three-Star Martell for his officers' celebration. He had never done anything like that before and everyone who heard about it was amazed.

He also procured as a personal companion, for he had none aboard the *Tiger,* a small black poodle which he came to call Little Harold or Little Hubert, depending upon which name came first into his head. It was an adolescent when he bought it, and in subsequent weeks he trained it up in his own image.

He taught it to growl at sailors when they came onto the bridge, to snap at them if they made a sudden move, to play rough and earnestly with the will to win. He did not teach it, but it learned from him to trust no kindness from the hand of man, to follow a plate of food and snap at the hand that set it before him, to sleep with its black eyes open.

Soon it became its master's shadow and followed him like a shadow everywhere. That was what the captain wanted it to do, but sometimes he seemed uneasy about its devotion. It seemed to him, sometimes, the poodle did not follow him but rather dogged his tracks. He could never swing around and pick it up in his arms and rub it against him like another pet or reach down and stroke its ears or run his hand through the springy carpet of its unclipped fur. He knew it would snap at him or even bite him, as indeed it did once, or worse yet, desert him.

When the master was on the bridge so was Little Harold, but he stayed off in a corner, curled-up with his chin on his paws, waiting and watching and, if the weather was hot, panting with his pink little tongue stuck part way out, his shaggy black whiskers forked out along his paws, and looking for all the world like the Devil's messenger.

After thirty-six hours in the South of France, the *Tiger* sailed for the Persian Gulf again. Port Said was chilly when the vessel passed through and the Egyptians wore scarfs, but the Red Sea was warm and became warmer almost by the hour as the ship moved south. In sight of Daedalus, the lighted shoal called Abul el Kizan, the *Tiger* broke down for several hours in the middle of the night, imperiling itself and other vessels on the busy track. When the ship was underway again, the captain called in the chief engineer and requested he make five more revolutions per hour in order to regain some of the time lost. The chief engineer warned that the extra strain would probably cause trouble, but the captain, certain that his fellow officer was out to discredit him, insisted and the chief, who was a peaceful man, obeyed.

Five hundred miles farther on, in the still latitudes where the winds meet off the coast of the Sudan, the vessel broke down again. The chief did not say, I told you so, but when he called the bridge to say he had stopped for repairs, the captain shouted into the telephone that he didn't see how anybody as stupid as he was could get to be even a tourist or a garbage man, let alone a chief.

Through a heavy twilight and a torpid night and on through the next morning while the sun blazed, the vessel drifted dead in the water. There was not a trace of a natural breeze and the men went about their work or lay in their cots on the poop deck wound around like mummies in sweat and stifling air. Some swore they would get off the *Tiger* even if they had to jump off in Egypt, and Goodwin, one of the sailors, said he would never, never sail a tanker again or make another trip with any man whatsoever whose name began with "D."

Some days later just inside the Persian Gulf a sandstorm struck across the narrow water though it was not the time of the year for sandstorms. Billows of pink sand rolled across the Gulf as if it were not water at all but just another desert, scattering enormous green and yellow grasshoppers, crickets and frantic birds, and covering the blinded *Tiger* with dust until it looked as if its job was to plow the desert rather than to ply the sea.

Enough additional hours were lost creeping through the sand fog for the *Tiger* to certainly lose its berth in Mena al Ahmedi, the oil dock in the Kuwait sheikdom.

"There's a Joaner on this ship," the master said in his usual half-joking, half-threatening way. "I've felt it for a time now. Somebody's hexing me." To Captain Dancer "me" meant, of course, the *Tiger*. It was just his way of talking, speaking of a Jonah, for it made him feel salty and in the old tradition to hark back to ancient sailors' fears. He had been a sailor himself, having come up in his work from the bottom and, like most sailors, he believed in Luck and in the bad luck, for instance, that whistling on a vessel brings. It was just his way of talking, but he began to keep an eye out for an evildoer.

At Mena al Ahmedi the captain was forced to anchor out for thirty-eight hours in the tranquil shark-infested roads watching other ships go in ahead of him to load. He could lose his charter if that kind of thing kept up.

When he finally did get in to the dock he had more trouble. Mr. Henke, the third mate and junior officer, visited the oil company's doctor and returned with a letter in duplicate saying, in effect, he was a nervous wreck.

He presented Captain Dancer with this letter, which was addressed to the master of the S.S. *Tiger* and which explained that Mr. Henke was of a disposition unsuited to such confinement as pertained to a tanker on a year's articles and with a long run. It recommended that he be relieved of his position at the next port of discharge, sent to a hospital for a thorough mental and physical examination, and returned, if necessary, to America at the company's expense. Mr. Henke kept the duplicate.

Captain Dancer read the letter, glancing suspiciously from time to time at Mr. Henke. When he came to the end, he grunted and asked sarcastically what kind of lies Mr. Henke had told the doctor.

"I don't lie," Mr. Henke said, drawing himself up and quivering a little to bear out the doctor's diagnosis. "I told him the God's truth."

"Such as," the captain demanded.

"All right, since you ask me, I'll just tell you." Mr. Henke hooked his thumbs cockily into his trouser pockets and thrust his face forward until the two black moles on his forehead were right under the captain's nose. He was much shorter than Captain Dancer and, of course, much younger. He was scarcely twenty-five.

He said that ever since the trip began in Texas he, the captain, had done nothing but torment him and play jokes on him and give him extra work to do that he knew he couldn't do because it was his first trip on the bridge and then jump on him because he naturally made mistakes. He had told the doctor, he said, he got so rattled with the captain standing over him all the time that he made all kinds of stupid mistakes he wouldn't of made if the captain had just gone ahead and left him alone.

Then Mr. Henke repeated about a dozen specific grievances he had listed for the doctor, not the least of which was the captain's habit, which Mr. Henke said was downright deliberate, of coming up and turning on the chartroom radio as loud as it would go and picking up some program like crazy Arab music or that Radio Moscow program with the woman reading the same speech over and over all day long, then *him* running off down to his room where *he* couldn't hear it and blowing up if it wasn't still on when he come back. "That *one thing* is enough to drive *anybody* out of their feeble mind," Mr. Henke exclaimed. By that time he was red in the face and shaking violently and not because he thought he should.

They were in the captain's office. Without another word to his officer, Captain Dancer snatched up his wide gray Stetson, which he wore all over the world though he did not come from the West, and crammed it upon his head so hard the felt tipped over his ears. He strode out of his office and along the cat walk. The little third mate, watching him go, danced with pleasure and agitation, crying, "Look at 'im go, look at 'im go, look at 'im go!"

With the letter clutched angrily in his hand, the captain marched straight up to the doctor's office which was in the company's infirmary just off the dock. There he caused a great deal of excitement. That particular doctor had given the captain trouble before by siding, as he usually did, with the men, and supporting their vaguest illnesses.

"He's no more nervous than I am," the captain shouted, and the doctor replied that he was doing Captain Dancer a favor by allowing the man to make the trip back. Then the captain accused the doctor of taking a bribe, and the doctor ordered the captain out of his office.

Captain Dancer marched straight back to the *Tiger* still crushing the letter in his fist and muttering, "We'll see, we'll see."

It was not the company's money that worried him most nor the sizeable inconvenience of engaging a new mate in Liverpool, nor even Mr. Henke's impertinence. It was rather the personal insult of a man's contriving to leave his command.

It had happened before, many a time. Men he had been fond of, good men, had left him and he could not understand why. Jim Day his radio operator, who was in a position to say things no one else dared to, told him once what the trouble was as he saw it. "You assume a man is dishonest by nature," he had said. "You take him for your enemy before you know him, and you make an enemy out of him because you force him to abandon his dignity to deal with you."

The captain had looked at him with his piercing, but uncomprehending, ratlike eyes and said:

"My men have got to live with me; I don't have to live with them."

Sooner or later every living creature turned away from him. His wife had left him not so long before, his two adolescent sons away in school took his money but never came around where he was. On the second trip through the Suez Canal two little land birds of the indiscriminate breed called "sailors' friends" had hopped aboard and stayed. The captain had fed them because he liked to be kind to what he called "poor creatures." Many a hot afternoon he had sat in his underwear on the boat deck spying on the sailors at work on the deck below and sprinkled meal for the two birds that hopped and pecked around his feet. He didn't have Little Harold then.

The birds lived around the midship house and played and quarreled constantly. If the captain closed his eyes, the rustling of the sea sounded like poplar leaves and he could imagine the birds teetering and darting in the tops of the trees as birds had done when he was a child.

But even they, the sailors' friends, had left him. They had disappeared one day from the midship house and turned up back aft by the crew's quarters. They never came back, and he claimed they had been kidnapped.

Less than nine hours after it had tied up at the dock, the *Tiger*, turgid with oil and a little down at the head, got underway again for the twenty-one-day voyage back to Liverpool; twenty-one days, that is, with good weather and good luck. It was five days to Christmas.

The very first night out the tanker hit a freak storm. There came a tremendous flood of rain and a wild wind that swooped around the vessel and scooped up the sea, quickly building high scrolled waves and jumbling them in every direction. Being poorly loaded, the *Tiger* rammed each towering sea like a man dumbly beating his head against a wall. Shortly, the rain stopped, the clouds moved away revealing hard bright stars overhead, but neither the wind nor the waves abated.

Captain Dancer kept watch in the wheelhouse, with the second mate on the wing of the bridge, while the poor helmsman struggled with the wheel which was taking three turns right and left just to keep to any kind of course at all.

"Oh keep to the course, can't you," the captain said in despair to the helmsman.

"I can't, Cap'n," the helmsman answered irritably. "She steers like a block of concrete."

The captain grunted and braced himself against the bulkhead by the porthole and stared out with a black look at the equally black and aggressive sea. Aloud he repeated, shame, shame, like an old lady, and closed his eyes each time the vessel's head rushed stupidly at a tall wave. "Oh shame on him," he said.

Each time the *Tiger* pitched, the pencil on the bell-book desk rolled, and on one particularly large sea, it hopped the ledge of the desk and dropped to the floor.

"Stoopid, stoopid," the captain muttered referring to whichever officer it had been that had finished loading his ship and left it in such a condition. Then he began to pace. Accidentally he stepped on the pencil. He reached down automatically and picked it up and put it back on the desk where it began to roll again.

"Did *you* top off this oilcan?" the captain shouted out to the second mate. The wind was too strong for the officer to hear, but the man on the wheel volunteered the information that it had been Mr. Henke.

"Wouldn't you know it," the master said.

The pencil hopped off the desk again, and again the master picked it up. He returned to his post by the porthole and the pencil hopped off again and rolled across the floor to his feet. In a sudden wrath he seized the pencil, held it up before his eyes, and shook it violently. "You little bastard," he said threateningly with his lips tense and his eyes squinted almost shut. "That third mate brought you in here; he's no good and neither are you."

When the chief mate relieved the second mate at four o'clock the sleepless captain was still on the bridge though the wind had stopped and the swells were smoothing away. The instant the captain caught sight of the mate he lashed out at him.

"How come you didn't notice she was down at the head?" he asked.

"How come *you* didn't?" the mate snapped back. He was always irritable just after being awakened at three-forty in the morning, and that morning the erratic pitching of the *Tiger* had so disturbed his sleep he was irascible enough to say things he wouldn't ordinarily have said. "*I* had nothing to do with it. Henke topped off, not me."

"Makes no difference, you know how stoopid he is, you should of kept an eye out, it's your job—"

"Cap'n, I didn't want to bring this up, but if you'll just think back, you'll remember I stood right here when we were leaving and told you we were down at the head and you said, no. And I made the suggestion that we ought to anchor and even her off because we might hit some rough weather but you wouldn't take the time—"

"It's your job," the captain said.

" 'We can do it in the Red before we hit any weather,' you said."

"It's your job."

"And it's *your* ship, you've said so often enough."

"Well I never heard any mate talk to his master like that before."

"You're not quite dead yet, Cap'n; you've got a *lot* of things to hear before you die."

"You'd better apologize."

"All right, I apologize. I'm sorry. I *am* sorry. I shouldn't have spoken like that but, Cap'n, every once in a while you get on a man's nerves."

The quartermaster, Goodwin, heard the whole argument, for it took place directly in front of him, and he could hardly wait until breakfast time to warn the deck gang about it. He knew what the result of the argument would be because he knew the captain's habits. Bright and early in the morning the captain would be out on deck in a frenzy, turning everything upside down.

He would have his gloves on and his most mistrustful face, and by casting aside the work the mate had ordered and changing men from job to job and standing over them making remarks while they tried to work, he could, after an hour or so, inject such disorder into a day's operations that it would seem to the sailors, as it had seemed so often before, that their very tools took on his nature and conspired against them. As tempers tautened, ropes would snarl and part, hammer heads fly off their handles, paint cans tumble down steps, and winches jam.

The captain did not need an argument to set him off, nor did he need to set foot on the deck to disturb the peace. Boredom would set him going, or anger within himself, or suspicion. Some days he would pretend to be taking the sun or reading a book in a chair in the open air, but he was watching everyone he could and the men who were forced to work in the open felt his eye on them. It made them begin to suspect themselves, and to feel guilty just walking the decks; and it made them pick at each other for little reasons or for no reason at all.

"This ship's no home," Goodwin frequently remarked, "it's a penitentiary."

Goodwin was wrong about the next day, however. The rainstorm, like the sandstorm, brought some birds and insects with it and washed some flying fish aboard. The fish lay strewn about the decks next morning, wide-eyed and gasping in the quiet daylight. The birds ate the insects and flew back to greener islands, and the Arab cook, Halim, gathered the fish, slit them, stuffed them with salt, and hung them up like Chinese kites to dry.

By the time the *Tiger* turned out of the Persian Gulf into the Gulf of Oman, the only living alien creature left from the storm was a cricket that had begun to sing as soon as the sea had quieted and the sun came up. It had lodged itself during the tempest in some crevice of the bridge, and after the wind and rain, the dawn was so still the sailor standing lookout on the bow could hear the singing. It sounded very near to him, and he began to look forward to Christmas.

It sounded so good to Captain Dancer, he forgot all about the storm and his trouble with the mate. He figured if a cricket could bring good luck to a household, it could bring it to a ship. After he had slept some, he awoke in the afternoon with the decision that the smartest thing he could do would be to capture the cricket and keep it safely in his room where it could go ahead and bring about, unmolested, such luck as it chose.

"The best thing for a Joaner," he said to himself, "is a cricket."

He looked around his office and found a little box, then he went to the bridge to trace down the insect. Its chirping, he found, came from the port wing, but he could not locate its hiding place exactly because each time he approached too near to it, the noise stopped.

All that day, at odd times when he happened to be on the bridge and heard the cricket, he went out to hunt it down, ignoring the smart remarks of the mates, the radio operator, and even the sailors at the wheel. At nightfall when he gave up trying to find it, he decided the next best thing to do would be to feed it. From breakfast the next morning he brought a saucer of scrambled eggs and tucked it up in the beams in the overhead of the port wing, well out of the dog's reach. Mr. Henke was on watch, and as soon as the captain stepped into the chartroom he fed the eggs to Little Harold.

The next day the captain put out more eggs which vanished in the same way, and the third day, the day before Christmas, Captain Dancer, who had been going about in very high spirits and cracking jokes and talking about his Christmas party, put out the eggs again and retired as usual to examine the charts.

He sang to himself as he stepped off the days to go to Aden and calculated the speed from noon the previous day to Ras al Hadd which had come abeam at dawn.

"Boy, oh boy," he exclaimed. The speed had been very good indeed. Of course there was a following breeze and a favorable current, and since the chief mate had shifted around the cargo, the *Tiger* sat better in the water. It had averaged a good fourteen knots. "Boy, oh boy," the captain chuckled to himself, "the greyhound of Oman."

"Cap'n, Cap'n, come here quick if you want to see something," Mr. Henke called as he crossed the wheelhouse to the chartroom door. The master looked sourly at him, but he hurried to the port wing when Mr. Henke added, "It's your cricket."

The third mate followed the captain who found Little Harold out on the wing of the bridge, stalking the cricket which had come out of its hiding place. Each time the cricket hopped, Little Harold sprang after it until he had it cornered. The captain, looking in dismay from one creature to another, was unable to decide whether to let the dog alone and lose his luck or save his luck and maybe lose his only friend. His instant's hesitation was too long. Little Harold yapped, pounced upon the cricket, and ate it.

"There goes your cricket," Mr. Henke said, spluttering into laughter. "And in nothing but one gulp."

"You set him on it," the captain said still bewildered. "You been a thorn in my side ever since you come on here."

"How could I? I didn't know where it was any more than you. I looked out and there they were, just like you saw them."

"You ain't getting paid to play with my dog."

"I wasn't playing with your dog."

"You're supposed to be tending to business, not playing with my dog. If you're so nervous, you better stay away from my dog, he'll take a . . . piece out of you."

Mr. Henke shrugged his shoulders, turned on his heel, and retired to the opposite wing of the bridge.

"Wouldn't you, Little Harold?" said the captain. "Yes, you would." He reached out his hand but the poodle backed away, lay down, and rolled its eyes upward toward its master. It began a whine that changed to a growl as the hand drew nearer. "Wouldn't you?" soothed the captain, slowly withdrawing his hand. "Poor Little Hubert."

For several minutes the master paced the wing of the bridge from the wheelhouse door to the very tip, approaching the railing with the pathetic demeanor of an insect which, having long labored its way by instinct along an undeviating track, finds itself at length frustrated by an enormous stone. Each time, his eyes, like feelers, explored the sea. He turned, paced again, and again felt out the ocean with his gaze. Finally he said, "Come on, Little Harold," and went below with his fuzzy black shadow of a dog scampering along behind him.

That evening, Christmas Eve, Mr. Henke, before he left his room to resume his watch, looked in his desk drawer for some matches and discovered that his copy of the letter describing him as a nervous wreck was gone.

The next day was more like Midsummer Day than Christmas. At noon the islands of Korya Morya had just passed astern, the temperature touched eighty-six, and the wind, unseasonably, remained a mewing kitten breeze that tagged along behind the *Tiger*.

It seemed that all the fish in the ocean had come to feed and sun there, for the weedy sea was like a meadow.

Whales and spotted blackfish rolled in the sun, dolphins split the waves, and banks of tiny white fowl flew up at the ship's approach and fell again, like a shower of paper, farther on. The clear air was riddled with the greedy cries of terns and wheeling gulls who saw a feast in all the fishes.

For months the *Tiger's* steward had prepared for Christmas dinner. On Thanksgiving he had slyly mixed in slices of duck with slices of turkey to make the store of turkey do for Christmas. In Provence he had ordered nuts and apples; in Egypt, melons and oranges; and in England, each trip, he had added to his store of sweets. The tables were laid with white cloths even for the unlicensed crew, and from half-past eleven to half-past twelve the feast was spread. Half of the red and half of the white wine were put out together. Besides turkey and cranberry sauce, there were baked ham with raisin sauce, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, broccoli, succotash, coleslaw, hot rolls, corn bread, pumpkin pie, hot mince pie with brandy, hot raisin pie with brandy, melon and coffee. Relishes of celery, olives and pickles and a tomato juice cocktail preceded the turkey.

Everyone ate and drank too much. At five o'clock the rest of the wine was served with a supper of lamb chops, and after sunset, when the shore had crept nearer and crouched like a sooty leopard in the moonlight, Captain Dancer, although he did not feel like having a party, invited all his officers except those on watch into the midship saloon. With a marlinespike he pried open the case of brandy and, brushing off clinging excelsior, handed each guest a bottle. He took a bottle for himself, opened it, and poured drinks all around; then he raised his glass and said, sourly, "Some Christmas." After that he took his bottle and the case and sat down by himself in a corner.

Jim Day, the radio operator, carried down his record player from the radio shack and put on a long-playing record of Christmas carols. The men sat around quietly, somewhat leadenly, sipping their brandies and listening to the boys' chorus. The high voices hurt Little Harold's ears and his occasional howls, mixed with "Adeste Fideles," "O Little Town of Bethlehem," and "Silent Night," drifted across the water to the Moslem shore.

"Black little devil," said Mr. Henke on the bridge. "Listen to him howl." In spite of Christmas the junior officer had eaten little, but since he had lost his letter he had been drinking considerably on his own. He spoke in frantic whispers to Ferguson, his helmsman. "He means to keep me on here like a prisoner. Just *listen* to him howl."

Ferguson, who was keeping a sorry course, sang softly with the music for a while, then he said, "Let him howl. What can you do about him, what can any of us?"

"Do you make it out?" Mr. Henke asked. "He hates me, he says I'm more harm than good to him, but he won't let me off. Do you make it out?"

"I know this for sure," answered the melancholy Ferguson, "this is no happy ship. Even back aft there, for weeks now he's had everybody so jumpy they're just waiting for the gong to tear each other apart, Christmas or no Christmas, yet they all like each other. You take the deck gang, *we* all like each other, yet still—I don't know, when this year's up I'm going to get me a happy ship." He gave the wheel a turn to bring the vessel back to the course he had drifted from. "You wait and see, before this night's over there's going to be a lot go on that wouldn't on a happy ship."

It was not long before Ferguson's prediction came true. Goodwin came into the saloon leading Tango the Englishman, who was bleeding from cuts in his head, saying that Tango had fallen down a ladder and would somebody please bandage him up.

Hopping out of his chair, the captain cried, "What's going on back there?"

"Nothing's going on," Goodwin said, and Captain Dancer said it was a shame that men couldn't even behave themselves on Christmas. He hustled the two men out the door and around the corner of the passageway into the hospital. He poured some alcohol on Tango's wounds, which were not severe, and carelessly wrapped some gauze around his head, then he hurried out the door and locked the two sailors in, saying, "I suppose you think I didn't invent that trick about the ladder."

When he passed the saloon he poked his head in the door to make sure his guests had not slipped off to form a party of their own, then he rushed out into the moonlight, flailing his shadowy arms, and flew aft along the catwalk to get to the bottom of the trouble. That took him longer than he had expected, and when he returned to the saloon he found Tango and Goodwin, who had climbed out the hospital porthole, drinking his brandy with his officers.

"You got no call to lock us up, we didn't do anything," Goodwin said immediately.

"I ought to lock you all up, you're nothing but a bunch of troublemakers," the master shouted. "What are you doing in my saloon? I don't want no sailors in my saloon. Get out." As they stepped out the door he shouted after them, "And you can tell all those drunkards back aft there that I meant what I said just now, and if you don't do what I told you, you'll *all* regret the day you had the bad luck to scent salt water."

Breathing heavily, he dropped into his chair and noticed he had lost two members of his party. His disappointment showed clearly on his face, and Jim Day explained that the mate, who was one of the truants, had said he was tired and had gone to bed.

"Since when does he get so tired," the captain muttered. For a while he sat in silence on the edge of his chair by one of the doors and seemed to be keeping guard. Since he and his officers had nothing to say to each other, his officers politely ignored him and talked among themselves. Suddenly he jumped up, roughly replaced the record of carols on the player, and turned up the volume to its limit, thus making conversation of any kind impossible. In addition, Little Harold began to howl again and howled continuously. This amused the master, who laughed and laughed, but it annoyed his guests.

Fortunately for them, Captain Dancer was restless. After a quarter of an hour and five or six fast brandies, he jumped to his feet again and went out the door to prowl the decks and the bridge. Little Harold went with him and Jim Day dashed to his record player, unplugged it, and carried it out of the room. He came back shortly and found his fellow officers exclaiming against the master's infuriating ways and telling each other all over again their more serious grievances against him. Not a man was there that had not promised himself, after some moment of anger or humiliation provoked by the master, that some day he would pay him back. Each of them, of course, had been strong enough and intelligent enough to satisfy himself with promises. The chief engineer, in particular, took great pride in his ability to forbear.

Abruptly the discussion ended when William, a fireman of Italian parentage, wandered tearfully into the saloon. The chief engineer gave him a glass of brandy and asked him what the trouble was. William, who was in his pajamas, explained that, as they probably knew, there had been a big fight and after it was over everybody had been sitting around having a good time in the messroom, drinking wine and singing and forgetting their little differences like they should, when the captain roared in saying he wanted to know who had started it. Nobody knew who had started it and nobody cared, but the captain said if somebody didn't come up and tell him who started it, he would take two days' pay from everybody.

And now, William cried, they were all back there fighting worse than ever trying to decide whose fault it was. As he spoke his tears increased, because telling about it reminded him of how disappointed he was that Christmas was spoiled.

The chief asked William what he was doing wandering around and the fireman said he had come up to tell the captain that he had done it.

"Done what?" asked the captain, stepping unexpectedly into the room. "What are you doing in my saloon? I don't want no firemen in my saloon. Get out."

"I came up to say I started the fight," said William.

"You men must think this is a joke," the master said. "Get out of here and tell them back there I give them until noon tomorrow to send me the real instigator."

"But, Cap'n, I—"

"Get out of my saloon! What do you guys think this is, a bar?"

William returned to his part of the ship, and the captain sat down again in his same chair, beginning steadily and earnestly to drink up his bottle. He brooded over his unruly crew and his unfriendly and dissembling officers who, even then, spoke in muted tones among themselves. One by one, as the long evening wore away, the guests departed, and the sodden captain made no move to detain them. He came to the end of his bottle and reached out toward the case for another, but he withdrew his hand when he remembered that bottle, the last one, was for Mr. Henke.

At twenty minutes to twelve the sailor Ferguson stuck his head in the door and reminded the second mate it was twenty minutes to twelve. At that time, near the change of the watch, only three men, besides the captain and the second mate, remained—the chief engineer, the first assistant engineer and the radio operator. When the second mate took his leave in order to take over the bridge, the captain said to him, "Tell that stoopid Henke to come down here."

A few minutes later the saloon clock struck the eight bells that ended Christmas, and the officers listened while the bells were repeated on the bridge and struck still again, some seconds later, on the deep brass bell on the fo'c'sle head. Everyone felt a little relieved.

"There you are," the captain said, as the third mate stepped rather shakily through the door. "Hey, Henke, I hear you're nervous."

Mr. Henke approached the captain and asked did he want to see him about something.

"Can you prove you're nervous?" the captain pursued. "I hear you got a letter to prove how nervous you are. Let me see it."

"Somebody stole it," Mr. Henke said.

"Somebody stole it, is that right?" The master roared with laughter. When he had calmed down, he said, "Son, you never had no letter, you had a dream."

"I had a letter and you know it, and the consul in Liverpool's going to know it too. He'll get me off of here, and he might get you a little something besides."

Again the master laughed, then in an instant he put on his pinched and vicious look and said, "I got news for you, you're going to *rot* on this ship."

Mr. Henke turned away.

"Where are you going?" the master demanded.

"I'm going to bed, Cap'n." He started across the room, but Jim Day detained him by shoving a glass of brandy into his hand.

"That's not your brandy," the captain said. "Here."

He rose from his chair, staggered, balanced himself, then reached into the pine case and pulled out the last bottle. "Here, this is your brandy," he said, thrusting the bottle in Mr. Henke's direction. "It's your Christmas present."

Mr. Henke said he wouldn't be caught dead taking a Christmas present from him, and he walked out.

The captain called after him, then followed him, still holding out the bottle by its neck.

The three guests remaining in the saloon heard the master bump from one bulkhead to another as he passed along the narrow passageway. They heard Mr. Henke's door open once and slam, and open and close again. Little Harold followed along but did not get into Mr. Henke's room.

Several minutes passed and Captain Dancer did not return. The officers, who were a little uncertain of their own steps, sat down again and started to finish off the bottle on the table. The first assistant asked why some guys couldn't leave other guys alone, and the chief said he had some influence with the company and would personally lodge a complaint against the master at the end of the voyage, particularly if the master ever dared insult him again.

Several more silent minutes passed, then there was a crash that set Little Harold to barking. Before anyone had a chance to stir himself to see what it was, the master came stumbling and wailing along the passageway to the door of the saloon. He stood there with his head back, his hands over his eyes that poured blood through his fingers and down his arms. All he could say was, "Look what he did to me."

For an instant none of the officers could move, so unexpected was the sight of blood.

"Look what he did to me!" the master piteously cried, still covering his bleeding eyes with his palms.

They crowded around him then, and Jim Day took his elbow and guided him across the saloon and through the opposite door and up the steps to the cabin while the others, now joined by the chief mate who had come out of his room when he heard the noise, hurried into Mr. Henke's room. They found him mostly undressed lying back on his bed clutching a pillow over his face.

When they pulled the pillow away and Mr. Henke saw them, he began to struggle. The first assistant ran up to the captain's room for the handcuffs while the other two dragged the junior officer to the shower. They shoved him into it, turned it on, and assailed him with questions: What did you do it with? Where is the weapon?

"You'll never find out," he shouted.

When the first assistant returned with the handcuffs, they turned off the cold water, pulled Mr. Henke dripping from the shower, pushed him down on the tiled floor, and cruelly locked his wrist to the lavatory pipe.

"To lay violent hands upon the master!" the chief engineer exclaimed in anger and disbelief. "To lay violent hands upon the master!"

Up in the captain's room, Jim Day washed and examined and bandaged up the victim's wounds. He gave him a shot of penicillin and a heavy sedative and stayed with him until morning.

Five days passed and Captain Dancer did not emerge from his bedroom. He kept the outside door open, for it was hot, and the sailors working around the bridge could look through the screen door into the dim chamber and see the master flat on his back with both eyes bandaged up blind. Little Harold kept to the room as well.

No one visited them except the steward, who personally brought what little food the master and his dog ate, and of course Jim Day, who tended the wounds. After several days Jim Day was able to remove the bandage from the right eye, allowing the master to see at least that much, but the left eye had been so deeply gouged that he was almost afraid to touch it. He continued the shots of penicillin, which he also gave to Tango for the cuts in his head. He dressed those wounds, too, and put down overtime for it all.

Meanwhile, Mr. Henke had been released by order of the master who made no threats of retribution. The master had called the mate to him and suggested nothing be entered in the logbook for the time being. "Not until my memory comes back," he said.

Mr. Henke, too, claimed to remember nothing. He said he had awakened in wet underwear on his bathroom floor, chained to the drainpipe and, shortly after the mate had come in and taken off the irons, he, Mr.

Henke, had discovered some very painful bruises on his throat. He would not venture to say, of course, that the master had tried to strangle him because, as he said, he didn't remember a thing, but the marks certainly looked like fingermarks to him. There had been no weapon; he guessed he must have used his thumbs. He told everyone how sorry he was, but at night he slept deeply and dreamlessly as he had not done in months.

The master did not sleep at all. The barbiturates he depended upon soon had no more effect than to toss him into a wakeful, spectered slumber. The ship's penicillin, obtained in France, was contained in a saline solution to which, it soon became apparent, the master was violently allergic. He turned red and swelled up and itched miserably, and spots appeared on his face and feet and hands.

Each morning he asked after the condition of Jim Day's other patient, Tango, and inquired if the same affliction had befallen him. Jim Day said no, not yet, and the master said bitterly that he didn't have to worry because it wouldn't.

He asked Jim Day to scout around and find out how much the crew knew about what he called 'his trouble.' "You know how a ship is," Jim Day answered immediately, "everybody knows everything."

The master also asked if any troublemaker had come up from back aft to confess he had started the fight on Christmas and Jim Day said no, he had seen no one, that everything had been peaceful.

The fifth day after Christmas, the master called in the chief mate and the chief engineer and ordered, in view of New Year's Eve coming up, a general search of all lockers and fo'c'sles aft. Any wine or liquor they found was to be confiscated and thrown overside.

While this was being done, the master stirred himself, bathed and shaved as best he could, then called a general muster of all hands after coffeetime at three-twenty.

It was a cool breezy day in the north end of the Red Sea and the crew gathered on the boat deck with shirts flapping. On bare swollen feet Captain Dancer hobbled onto the bridge and looked down with his one unbandaged eye upon his men, none of whom had seen him in the light of day since Christmas. All puffed up and spotted he was a startling sight, with the white bandage on one eye glaring in the sun.

He said, "There's been some fist fights among you men." This caused a general stir and elicited a few snickers.

"You might think it's funny now. I'm talking to you who were mixed up in it. I know who you are and so do you. Maybe you remember I told you to come tell me who started it; well, I haven't been told. Anybody have anything to say?"

Nobody did.

"All right, have it your own way and take your punishment."

Goodwin spoke up and said they had tried to decide who was to blame for everything and they decided that none of them were, but that *he* didn't care that much about his money so he'd say that he started it.

"That won't do," said the captain, "I want the real instigator." No one else stepped forth. "All right, now, what I want to tell you is that this is going to stop."

His listeners strained to hear, for the wind blew some of his words away and his lips were so swollen he could not speak clearly.

"You men can get along if you want to, you don't have to be—oh I spect you're mad because I took your liquor. Well go ahead. I should of done it a long time ago. You do something for somebody, you try to do something nice, and it comes back in your face. I authorized that wine to make Christmas cheerful. I knew it was hard being away so long and out in the ocean on Christmas and that's why I did it. Well, I'll never do it again. And I don't want another drop to come on this ship as long as I'm master. You all hear? And I want all this quarreling and fighting and beating each other up to stop. Now it's *going* to stop—you know I can make a lot of trouble for you all."

A gust of wind whipped around the corner of the bridge and threatened to rip off his bandage. He clapped his hand on it and with the other hand, after momentarily releasing the rail that kept him from tottering, he quickly waved his men away.

Thankful to be released, they crowded toward the ladders to the catwalk and the deck, and they broke into discussion even before they were out of the master's hearing. Captain Dancer heard one of the men make an ill-concealed remark to another, saying that in his opinion the best job for him, meaning the master, would be a lighthouse keeper where he would be kept away from human beings.

That night, when the master could not sleep again because of his afflictions, he remembered that remark as he sat on the edge of his bed and looked out his screen door and across the water to Abul el Kizan which was just then coming abeam. He was well acquainted with its flashing light and the stony isolated cluster of knuckles its tower stood upon.

What a terrible thing, he thought, for one man to say about another. What a terrible thing to be compelled to live out there and watch the ships pass by and pass by and have to tend the light that warned them all away from him.

He called Little Harold and the dog came up and lay down several feet from him and kept him distant company. "Poor Little Harold," the master cooed. "Little Harold, there's a Joaner on my ship."

The light in the sea flashed once, twice, three times, and the master repeated to himself that there was a Jonah on his ship, but he could not understand, nor was it likely he would ever understand, that it was he.

The Schedule

by FRANÇOISE MALLET-JORIS

This is my schedule: Six o'clock, get up. Suzanne is still asleep. (I can't very well complain about my wife's sleeping soundly. My mother also used to surprise me by her capacity for sleep as well as by the quantities of medicines she took. That too was quite a schedule: injections, followed by pills, followed by drops.) Then setting-up exercises. Since even a writer has to take care of his body, I do setting-up exercises. Suzanne is still asleep. Aniouta also. (I'll explain about Aniouta later; she doesn't fit in here.)

Six-thirty, get dressed.

Seven o'clock, walk through the streets of Paris. This serves a dual purpose: I have something to look at and some fresh air to breathe. Only I question whether this is really an advantage. Too often the critics have commented on "Serge Brenner's interest in the poor, which is so reminiscent of Dostoevsky. . . ." I blame all this on my mother who loves the unusual, on my Russian grandfather whom I never knew, on the first critic who stuck (and stick she did, like a burr) that description on one of my books. Dostoevsky indeed! If I were to rewrite Paul Bourget's *Blue Duchess* (I think it was Bourget's) the critics would still find that it smacks of Dostoevsky. My morning walk is ruined whenever I think of him. How I loathe Dostoevsky! I'd cross myself at the very sound of his name if I thought that would exorcise him, but I know that I should continue to be haunted by a procession of icons and samovars. Might as well give up.

Normally I take advantage of a free Saturday afternoon to visit museums, for they are a good source of comparisons for descriptive passages. On one of these I decided to be unfaithful to my wife. As this is most unusual for me I shan't linger on the incident. She was naturally much less attractive than Suzanne—a meaningless fact and besides I only half liked the woman. In the first plush hotel where we stopped there was no room free: hotels of that kind are usually full on Saturdays. I suggested another, inferior one and, since she liked me, she did not demur. I hadn't been near the place in five years; from second-rate it had turned into a flea-trap.

"You're sure you don't mind?"

"Not a bit. It makes me feel like a character in one of your novels; it's so Dostoevsky-like."

What a blow! We spent the afternoon at a movie.

This is not really a digression. Seven to eight, walk and meditate.

Eight o'clock, go home. Aniouta gets up. My daughter is five years old. Her name is really Anne, but her grandmother, who cannot resist the unusual, calls her that and Suzanne and I weakly follow suit. Weak-minded as I am, if in twenty years my mother is still living, we'll gather around a samovar, Anne will get married in the Russian quarter and when she is unfaithful to her husband, people will blame it on her Russian background. Poor child.

Eight-thirty, breakfast. Suzanne is up. Enter Mina, the maid.

"What a cold morning. How can Mr. Brenner. . . ."

One would think that my morning walk (like everything else I do, for that matter) is a personal insult. She hovers over Suzanne.

"Will there be anything else? Good Lord! It's quarter to nine already! Here are your things."

Suzanne drops Aniouta at the kindergarten on her way to the advertising agency where she works. Mina feels sorry for her and makes an outrageous fuss over her: I can find my own overcoat. (Yesterday I had the cheek to ask to have a button sewn on.) I can look for my own brief case. Mina couldn't care less. I don't have an office; I don't have set hours. I can wait until she has time to sew that button back on. (She couldn't do it yesterday, what with all the work she has to do in the apartment—three rooms—and all those papers lying about!) I can wait until she happens to stumble over my brief case—it can't possibly be lost. I have no office, Mina, but I do have a schedule. She snorts.

Actually my schedule allows for all this. In the face of her manifest ill will, I have added a heading which rather pleased me: Nine to nine-thirty, commotion. In this manner I reach, at nine-thirty, the café where I work undisturbed until twelve forty-five.

"Mr. Brenner is at a café," Mina scornfully tells any chance visitor. She never says, "Mr. Brenner is working."

And at one o'clock when I go home for lunch: "The butcher saw you at a café."

What's so surprising about that? I've gone there every day for the past ten years. At first, when I was still living with my mother, I went there to get away from the sound of her voice. Then, when I was first married, it was to get away from Aniouta's. And now I go there from force of habit. (Mina's handling of the vacuum cleaner effectively replaces my mother's and the baby's sound effects.) So what is so surprising about my being seen there? Yet Mina never fails to mention this as though she had found me out in some shameful secret. I spend my life in a café. Poor Mrs. Brenner! That I unaccountably earn my living in this deplorable manner only makes matters worse. Furthermore, Mina is not going to be bribed into keeping her thoughts to herself simply because this is my means, albeit modest, of livelihood. Halfhearted protests from Suzanne, laughter or tears from Aniouta—a typically Russian atmosphere.

I look at my watch. From two to two-twenty I rest. After I have finished my coffee I stretch out for twenty minutes with my eyes closed. I must lie down before dealing with my correspondence (two-thirty to three-thirty), the reading of manuscripts (three-thirty to five-thirty) and a visit to the Art Editions, in which I have an interest (six to six-thirty). This is an afternoon sufficiently well filled to satisfy even the most carping critic. Not Mina. She has a genius for whittling down my twenty minutes. She brings the coffee in late with the excuse that I'll be undisturbed after my wife has gone. She then blows in like a gale with an urgent letter which turns out to be an advertisement for Nescafé. She runs the vacuum cleaner, breaks a plate and, when she runs out of ideas, sings. When she suddenly stops, the house has never seemed so quiet. I look at my watch: only nine more minutes. How can I relax for nine minutes? I can't insert another heading of "Commotion" to my afternoon schedule, there isn't room. I leave the house, quivering.

I have been feeling tired for some time. One of my books has just come out and I have already sketched out the next one in my mind. I do this sort of thing automatically without having to think about it—I suppose it's my subconscious at work; it's very convenient. After that all I need to do is put my schedule into operation: five hours of work per day for one year; seven hours for six months; ten hours for three months. Then I have it typed, and there it is.

But not this time. I have the outline and the schedule as usual but I can't seem to put it into operation. I just cannot settle down to work. My daily walk is haunted more and more by Dostoevsky. How can I manage to keep all traces of him out of my novel so that no one will accuse me of having imitated him and of having finally overdone it? How can I get the point across that I detest him, that I can't keep his characters straight, that I don't even read Russian and that I make it a point never to read a translation? Incidentally, my plot calls for a beggar. I can't have a beggar! Why not simply a drunk named Nicholas Arcadovitch, or something of the sort? "This is super-Dostoevsky, my dear Serge Brenner, and just as we were about to congratulate you, too; you must steer clear of him." I hear them even at night.

Nonetheless I continue to follow my schedule. Walk, meditate, Aniouta, the Café des Sports five hours a day. But I produce not one single sentence, not even the title. Instead, I draw pictures of cats. I can't draw anything else, although I used to do water colors. One morning I drew two hundred and fifty cats each with a different expression. I am also becoming increasingly sensitive to Mina's insinuations. "The painter saw you at the café." I can see the day when she will add "drawing cats." I am sure she wouldn't be a bit surprised if I were paid for drawing pictures of cats . . . there are so many queer things going on nowadays. But I am not going to sink to the level of a paid cat artist. I must do something. I have decided to go to the country.

Suzanne thinks this quite natural. Writers need to immerse themselves in nature every so often. Everybody knows that. They also need solitude. Go, my darling, and don't worry about anything. "Why should he?" Mina asks aggressively, pulling out of a scrap basket a sheet of paper which I had absent-mindedly thrown there. "May I give this to Aniouta? Then it won't be wasted." It's time for me to go; I am about to be found out.

I leave on the thirtieth, which allows me to arrive on the first and to take a rest cure of thirty days exactly. I like round figures. The most important thing is that I must do no writing. But in the country, what is there to do? I'll surely be bored to death unless I give some direction to my life. Therefore I make up the following schedule: Eight o'clock, get up; setting-up exercises, of course—I mustn't let myself go. Breakfast (Mina's absence will be beneficent). Nine to twelve, walk. I must drink in nature, fill my lungs with oxygen, collect a few comparisons, my constant preoccupation. Noon, lunch (still without Mina). I shall then have twenty minutes of relaxation without losing a single second.

All I have left to do now is to organize the afternoon. Write? No. Letters? Perhaps. Yes. I am glad to have hit upon that. There are so many friends one loses sight of, so many civilities one regrets not having paid, and a postcard can make up for a dinner invitation that was refused. This will be a profitable occupation without undue mental strain. Let's say from two to three. At three I'd like something else. A variety of occupations is essential, but when I am not working I always feel that I am wasting time. Perhaps I could take up painting again. I might even be able to do something other than cats. The thought appeals to me. Very well, painting from three to five. Then reading. I shall at last be able to get to all those books with the wonderful titles which I keep buying but which I never find time to read. Reading from five to seven; then dinner, and I shall plan to stay until nine in the dining room which also serves as a bar and where I can study local types.

There, that's done. The first week slips by without a hitch. The new schedule works as smoothly as a well-oiled machine. My long walks unquestionably do me good; my friends are delighted to receive my thoughtful letters and I like writing them for I have been losing touch. My bright water colors are a pleasant distraction and Aniouta likes them; I have finally read the novels written by my friends M, R, X—all those novels, with their dedications, whose gloomy bindings used to look at me reproachfully from the shelves of my library. I have read the book on China and the one about Victorian England which I bought three years ago. All would be well if only. . . . I must have written too enthusiastically, for my friend R, on the ninth day, announces his forthcoming visit. Fortunately I have read his novel. In Paris I always managed to avoid the subject, but here in the country it would be more difficult. Who knows,. the main purpose of his visit may be to corner me on that score. But this is not my real objection.

He is due to arrive at one o'clock. By that time I ought to be having my dessert. And what about my twenty minutes' rest? Let's assume that I'll sacrifice them to him. Let's even assume, since he is a friend, that his visit can take the place, in my country schedule, of the heading "Letter writing to friends." A bit of rationalization, true, but it will do. Will he be gone by three? Probably not. He must be looking forward to a pleasant afternoon in the country until at least five. What about my painting? This throws everything off again. I am obsessed by this question until his arrival.

He is late. One-thirty! I ought to be taking my nap by now. It isn't that I'm sleepy; it's the principle of the thing. I try hard to relax. I manage a smile. We have lunch. He is pleasant, lively, warm. René likes me and I like him. But the thought that he is making me waste time obsesses me, gnaws at me, deafens me to the point that I cannot hear his well-intoned conversation. This is absurd since I came here for the express purpose of doing nothing! But this nothing has become organized, has turned into something in which René has no place. I ought to have allowed for his visit, to have set aside one day a week for "visits from friends." Then I should have been perfectly relaxed.

René is eating with maddening deliberateness. It is already two-forty. My worst fears are realized: he will not leave until five. I try to adjust myself to this thought, to rid myself of my obsession. I'm turning into a maniac. At last he is through. I am very fond of René. I keep repeating to myself: "friendly chat until five o'clock." After I have repeated this heading two or three times, it begins to seem natural and I view him more kindly; I even start to say to him, "Your novel is really . . ." when he gets up and says guilelessly, "Why don't we go for a walk?" Walk? But walking is from nine to twelve! It isn't that I'm tired. But something within me rebels, becomes frantic again. Despite my efforts to remind myself that I'm being absurd, I have to make a superhuman effort to follow him, gnashing my teeth as I go.

And this goes on until evening. We walked, drank tea, talked, dined, smoked. He didn't leave until nine, delighted with his "day in the country," and I answered, smiled, walked, talked, smoked with an all-consuming hatred in my heart. And when he had finally gone, I went back to my room where I collapsed sobbing on the bed. Sobbing.

I had been proud to take my father's place, to have responsibilities; proud, at the age of twelve, to answer the invitations of my friends with, "I can't; I have to look after Mother." Proud to work for her, proud of my good marks, of my discipline. I loved my life, the hours spent at school, the hours I spent in the evening writing, filled as I was with the hope (a well-grounded one as it turned out) of earning my living by it some day. And all through the years I loved having a schedule for injections, pills, drops. I had been a model pupil, a model teacher. My first book sold well. I would become a model writer, a model father. The essential was discipline. We can make what we want of life if we are sufficiently determined. But one single false step, one single slip, one minute's delay can make everything disappear, like Aladdin's palace.

I looked at my watch, at the alarm clock. I was exactly halfway through my first novel. I had to stop in one minute to give some drops to my mother who was so ill that she often gasped for breath. I loved my mother. I didn't dislike my profession as a teacher; I should have to remain one if these notebooks did not turn into a book. Or if this book went by unnoticed. I daydreamed. The clock showed one minute past nine. Mother was already waiting on the floor below. I must remember her schedule. Drops now. I wondered why I wanted to write. I had no real taste for risks—or did I? I had no need to escape; I loved my life—or did I?

It was nine-thirty by the clock.

These notebooks which were the very essence of my life were suddenly, with all their questions, like hostile strangers. Since I loved my life, my mother, her schedule, my profession, since I loved my wife, my daughter, unquestioningly, why this urge to write?

I began to feel rebellious against the tyranny of this work which now seemed meaningless. Why another profession? Why more questions? Weren't there enough unanswered ones already? I had started to write for pleasure; the writing had turned into a quest for advancement, for change, for a pleasanter profession with a more varied landscape. Would it never be more than that? Wouldn't there always be interruptions for medicines, for letters? Had I become a prisoner of my own handiwork? Ought not these notebooks to answer some of my questions?

I found I was tired. Tired from so much effort and too weak to do anything about it. Automatically my eyes turned to the large alarm clock. I leapt up.

When I came into her room she had turned blue. She was revived with the greatest difficulty. Thank heaven she is still alive.

I don't know what made me think of this incident. In any event there is nothing to be learned from it. It is far too reminiscent of Dostoevsky. But René's visit has put me on my guard. I watch myself very closely and find I am a little queer. For example, when I have decided to walk fifteen kilometers, nothing would induce me to walk an extra one. But I am not going to start inquiring into the reasons for this. There are too many uncertainties when one ventures along unknown paths. The only time I ever tried to question the world I nearly killed my mother. I am not going to risk any more deaths; the game isn't worth the candle. I am quite pleased to have found the title of my next novel, *The Schedule.* And there will be no beggars. Not even a little one. It will be quite Kafka-like. I must have a German grandfather somewhere in my background.

—Translated from the French by C. J. Richards

A Grove in Syria

by P. H. NEWBY

Throughout his meal Captain Bowman had been drinking Cypriot brandy which he hated and when, for the third time that evening, the Poles at the next table began singing, he stood up. In England one sent for the head waiter. In Lebanon one had to fend for oneself.

"For God's sake," he shouted in French, steadying himself on the back of his chair, "Shut up!"

There were many Poles in Lebanon at that stage of the war. They came, most of them, from Russia, through Persia. Polish youths in battle dress strolled about the streets of Beyrouth and there were a good many Polish girls in uniform too. But they lacked the money to put up at a hotel when leave came round. It would have been surprising to find one Polish soldier spending August in this small mountain hotel; to find three of them together was extraordinary. And they were so happy! Most of the Poles Bowman had seen were grim or blank. This trio was serenely happy. Bowman had been aware of their happiness ever since they arrived at the hotel three days before. Their joy seemed to prevent their being aware of anyone but themselves. They talked quietly, only to burst into loud laughter. Sometimes, as now, they sang together very quietly as though part of a larger choir; and they were listening as they sang, anxious to keep in time.

One of the Poles was a girl and Bowman thought she was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

"You've ruined my dinner." Bowman spoke French because it was the only foreign language he knew and there was little chance of the Poles understanding English.

"What you've got to be so cheerful about anyway," he said to the girl, "I can't imagine. If I were a Pole I'd kill myself."

She was nineteen or twenty. A hollow appeared in the white throat as she turned her head, lifting it to look into his eyes. He wanted to put out a hand and touch the smooth skin, follow the line of the jaw from ear to the point of her chin. Out and round, in again delicately and beyond, the chin was firm as a nut. She had brown, deeply set eyes and wiry brown hair that lifted in the breeze blowing across the terrace.

Bowman knew that everyone was looking at him: plump Egyptians, cow-eyed Armenians, Jews from Tel Aviv.

"Come here for quiet," he muttered, "I've a damn good mind to report you to your units for disorderly conduct."

"Won't you join us?" said one of the men in English. Either he did not understand or was mocking.

"I told you to make less noise," Bowman said stiffly and sat down at his table once more to finish the brandy.

"No really!" The Pole leaned across, tilting his chair. "Do please join us. We are sorry that we annoy you."

"Then perhaps you'll be quieter in future." Bowman drained his glass, stood up and made his way to the end of the terrace where he lit a cigar and leaned over the stone balustrade to gaze down the thousand-foot drop to the clouds below. Like sheep, they were packed together in the moonlight, motionless between the mountains.

"We really are very sorry." Turning his head Bowman saw that the Poles, the girl too, were at his side. The other guests watched from their tables. Waiters paused with trays in their hands. Damn it! thought Bowman. Trust foreigners to make a scene!

"I've got nothing to say. If you're sorry, you're sorry."

"We are happy," said the girl in French, "because we are to be married, that is all."

"Married?"

At this end of the terrace the only light came from the moon. Her countenance was idealized like a mask, delicate and flawless. Her eyes flashed very white as she turned her head.

"What, all three of you?"

"I am going to marry either Hubicki or Skowierski. We have come here to decide which one it is to be."

Bowman's first thought was that in some way she was being impertinent. They were too calm for that. He looked for any flicker of resentment but the three faces gazed back at him with a simple frankness.

"If you don't know your own mind, young woman, it's no business of mine. Don't suppose you'll marry either of them!"

"I am Polish. I will marry one of these two men and they are Polish. I marry a Pole. Other Polish girls have married English and Americans and French. I marry a Pole. It is a Polish marriage. It doesn't matter which of these men." She paused. "We owed you this explanation for our singing. I am sorry we annoyed you."

"How long are you staying?"

"Two weeks more," said one of the men.

"I shall ask to be moved to another table," said Bowman and stalked back into the hotel, scattering cigar ash, ignoring the stares of the other residents, aware that he was more fatigued than he had any right to be, yet knowing that if he went to bed he would lie, sleepless, staring at the ceiling as he had stared last night and the night before. If he were twenty years younger he'd have taken that girl off the two Poles. Marrying a chap just because he was your own nationality, that was nonsense! No, she liked neither of them really. If he were a young man he'd have proved it; but he was forty-eight, very tired and in great need of quiet.

The following morning he sat at his usual point of vantage among the pine trees, looking down the side of the mountain at the roofs of the hotel, the bared, broken rocks beyond and—now that the clouds had receded—the deep, dry gut of the valley. Guests were sunning themselves on the terrace. Others were strung out along the road to the village. But the Poles (there was no mistaking them! nobody else, save Bowman, wore khaki) were sitting at the three points of a small triangle among the rocks. The air was so quiet that he could detect the gaiety in their voices. The rocks glittered; the sun broke against the crystalline faces and the Poles seemed to be set apart from the rest of the morning, as though on a lighted stage. They were laughing again. How could they *dare* to be so happy? They were, all three, happy like birds on an April morning; and Bowman could feel their happiness drawing him, as the sun draws water.

They were throwing stones. As he came down the mountain he could see that they were taking it in turn to throw at some object, a bottle or a tin. The nearer he approached, the more embarrassed Bowman became; he even tried to find patches of grass to walk on so that his approach might be unnoticed. Right up until the last moment he wished to keep open the possibility of changing his mind and withdrawing unnoticed.

"Broken glass," he said, as soon as he had the older of the two men's attention, "well, that's the way to start a fire. All this dry grass and thistle." He spoke in English because this particular fellow, he remembered, had spoken English the night before. Bowman did not like the look of him; he had thin, colorless hair smoothed to his round skull, a long nose and no chin to speak of. He was much older than his companions—about thirty, Bowman judged. In deference to the girl's presence Bowman raised fingers to his beret and would have walked off among the rocks, delighted to have taken them by surprise, if the English-speaking Pole had not jumped to his feet saying, "Good morning! You are the English officer staying at the hotel."

Bowman did not answer. He was outraged by the note of self-congratulation in the fellow's voice; as though he were saying, "Ah, you think I don't remember you. But I do!" Bowman saw that the other Pole had crawled on his hands and knees across to the girl and they were now talking quietly together, the girl looking out across the valley and tapping her upturned toe with a twig.

"Yes," said the Pole, emphatically. All doubt had been driven from his mind. "You are the English officer. Perhaps you are surprised why I speak English so well. For three years I worked in America."

"Then you ought to know better than to smash bottles and leave glass about the place."

Bowman marched off and that would have been the end of the encounter if the Pole had not trotted after him, saying, "Excuse me, sir, but can you direct us to Afka?"

"Afka?" Bowman turned sharply. He could not get it out of his head that the fellow was laughing at him.

"You know, it cannot be far. We have no map. At

Afka is the source of the Adonis river. It is the site—"

"Yes, yes."

"We want to walk there, my friends and I. We could take a picnic."

"Never heard of the place," said Bowman.

"It was famous once. There was a great temple to Venus."

Bowman had walked on about ten yards when it occurred to him that if the fellow *was* laughing at him it would be wrong to snub him too vigorously and so reveal just how much he had been provoked. He turned back.

"When I went to school," he said, "there was a boy called Prutowski. He always said he was Polish. His home was Cracow. He'd be about fifty now. D'you know him?"

"Prutowski? No."

"Very good footballer," said Bowman. "Scrum half."

"No, I am sorry. I never knew anyone by that name."

Bowman nodded and walked from the shadow of one castellated rock to another. When he came to the edge of the ravine he was unable to detect any other human figure in the stony landscape. From his feet the limestone cliff dropped a sheer three hundred feet to a point where boulders and dwarf junipers could cling to the gradient; below the junipers was the shadow cast by the opposite mountain. Within ten seconds, Bowman thought, he could, if he wished, be no longer alive.

The war bored him. Life bored him. He was bored with the thought of his wife, back home in Chiswick. She'd be better off without him and with a pension. What was the point of being alive? Perhaps he would not have these thoughts if he were living a more natural life; the life of a savage, that is to say. Bowman had pondered a great deal on what constituted a natural life; in his view it was to be so near the level of subsistence, surrounded by so many dangers, that one had no time for speculation. Even in a war there was far too much time for sitting around and moping, particularly if they thought you were too old for the fighting. His comfortable job at the base bored him to the point of suicide. Ludicrous, of course, to kill yourself in the middle of a war. It might even affect one's pension rights.

That Pole must have been pulling his leg because there was a *Guide Bleu* in the hotel and if he'd really wanted to go to this place—what was it? Afka?—he could have consulted that. Afka! Could there be such a place? He thought there was some highbrow writer with a name like Afka. Bowman's curiosity was sufficiently aroused, when he returned to the hotel, to borrow the book from its shelf behind the reception desk and carry it off to his room. Yes, Afka was a real place, it seemed. The Adonis river had its source there, gushing out of a cave. Then there was all this stuff about Venus and Adonis. In the spring, when the river was in spate, it washed the iron salts out of the earth and ran red, like blood. The blood of Adonis, gored by the fabulous wild boar. In antiquity there was a temple. The remains were still to be seen, around the mouth of the cave. Bowman looked at the map and saw it was a good fifteen miles as the crow flew between the hotel and Afka. It would be rough country.

Bowman found himself wondering whether he was still capable of the thirty miles there and back in one day. Without going down to the coast and then hiring a car to bring one up the Adonis valley, the only means of reaching Afka was on foot. He studied the map carefully. If these contours were accurately drawn, he would have to go over the neck of the mountain behind the hotel, drop down into a valley and climb up again, work round the shoulder of another mountain and then follow, right up to Afka itself, the top rim of the limestone cliff which, he knew, followed the four thousand feet mark throughout this section of the range. As he walked on the edge of the cliff to Afka he would be looking down into the Adonis gorge. The map showed all this detail admirably.

"Tomorrow," he said to the hotel manager as soon as lunch was over, "I want you to have some food put up for me. I plan to leave about seven and be all day walking."

Once the decision was taken he felt more cheerful than at any moment since his arrival. During the afternoon he dozed on the balcony. Before dinner he changed and walked down to the village where a café proprietor fished bottles of beer out of a bubbling spring and served as cool a drink as anyone could procure in these mountains. At the next table a middle-aged Lebanese was eating salad and kebab, tapping one foot in time with one of those Parisian jigs, all saxophone and accordion, which the café gramophone was projecting into the vine arbor where he and Bowman were the only patrons.

Bowman remembered that he had failed to ask for a different table in the hotel dining room; so he would have to sit next to the Poles again, singing like mad no doubt, if he went back to the hotel to eat. It even crossed his mind to go without dinner altogether, thinking to sleep better on an empty stomach. After three skewers of kebab, a bowl of salad and a glass of coffee he climbed slowly up to the hotel, listening to the beat of his heart and thinking he was as sound, physically, as he had ever been; a bit out of training, perhaps, but not such a crock he couldn't walk thirty miles even of this country between sunrise and sunset.

As for the Poles, they did not enter his mind until half-past seven the following morning when he gave a last glance back at the hotel preparatory to crossing the ridge and plunging into the next valley. He saw them, sharp and clear in the morning sun, just as they were leaving the road and tackling the wild path which would bring them in due course to the point at which he was standing. There was no doubt about it. They were the Poles; Bowman could see a point of light, the sun, on the girl's hair.

He sat firm. If they passed without noticing him, so much the better; but in any case he was making no move until he knew where they were bound for. Dreadful to walk all the way to Afka, trailed by three singing Poles! And he sat so still among the rocks they might well have tramped past without spotting him, but for a shepherd's dog, a great dun brute with enough teeth for a shark, which bounded menacingly up to Bowman and only turned tail when its master whistled from the path below. Bowman had jumped to his feet. He watched the dog follow its black-breeched lord until he became aware that the Poles were standing at his side.

"Those bloody dogs!" He had been so disconcerted by the beast's evident ferocity that he spoke in English. "Shoot them and their owners shoot you! And if you don't shoot them they gnaw you in half."

"We're going to Afka," said the Pole who had been in America. "See all our food!" He patted a canvas valise. They were all carrying these valises. So, for that matter, was Bowman.

The girl looked at him intently. "You are coming too?"

"Me?"

The girl nodded seriously. She did it self-consciously, as though trying to attune herself to his mood. She was hatless. Over her khaki shirt she had slipped a white woolen jacket, ostentatiously civilian, and the extra touch of femininity made her, in Bowman's eyes, almost painfully lovely. He noticed her long, brown fingers.

"But why not, Hubicki?" she said in French.

Hubicki was the one roughly her own age. The Polish eagle on his forage cap glinted in the sun, bright as the eyes that looked out of the round, almost beardless face. He had, though, comically heavy fair eyebrows in compensation, and as Bowman looked at him he remembered the high tenor singing voice that prim, almost girlish mouth could produce.

"No," said Hubicki. This was the only word Bowman understood out of the flow that followed. Hubicki took a step forward and addressed him in Polish. His eyes sparkled with mischief. The other Poles began laughing.

"You ought to tell him," said Bowman, "it's damn bad manners to speak to anyone in a language they don't understand."

He picked up his valise, meaning to return to the hotel, but immediately Hubicki's manner changed. He began shouting. Bowman saw that the gaiety had changed to anger. The little dumpling of a face was pale with strong feeling. A clenched fist was raised. The American Pole patted him consolingly on the shoulder but the boy went on shouting, throwing his shoulders back, puffing out his chest. Bowman looked at the girl. She was watching Hubicki intently. From now on the three Poles ignored Bowman. Hubicki having discharged his anger at the ungracious Englishman, they washed him out of their consciousness. Bowman stood watching them tramp off in the direction of Afka. For the first time they had dropped their aura of happiness.

He could neither follow nor go back to the hotel. After some hesitation he returned to the road and continued down toward the valley bottom, following a path that led through a vineyard to a geological fault which made it possible to descend the limestone rampart to gentler slopes.

It was ten o'clock before he reached the stream. The water was low, very clear, straw-colored. With a soaked handkerchief he wiped the sweat from his face, shuddering at the cold, and set himself to the rising ground on the far bank. Within a matter of minutes the track was so steep he was catching at roots and grasses with his hands. Steady now! Steady! You've got all day! No need to hurry! No need to exhaust yourself! He found grapes in his haversack and ate them to quench his thirst.

By noon he had covered the worst of the climb and his shirt clung wetly to his body. There was no life on this side of the valley. The two villages and the hotel were over there, on the northern slopes. Here, on the skirts of one of the highest peaks in the Lebanon range, were only rocks and silence and occasional pockets of bleached grass. The remotely distant hotel windows winked in the sun.

With his back to a boulder he sat eating flaps of bread and soft cheese, tomatoes, cold chicken wrapped in lettuce leaves, grapes; his stomach rumbled with appeasement. And then he slept, stretched out on his back in the full sun, dreaming about the young Pole, the boy with the eyebrows.

Hubicki! Hubicki! The voice was the girl's. Hubicki himself was naked to the waist, running through a darkness of rock and tree trunks. He bled from a deep wound in the back. A boar stalked him like a cat; the beast slipped from one tree to another with unpiglike agility, blood on his tusks. Hubicki! the girl called. She was laughing. The wood was full of laughter. Hubicki! Hubicki! The boar grunted, the boy ran with blood rising like a spring in his wound.

For some moments after waking Bowman gazed into the empty blue sky. His body ached as though it had been beaten. He thought of it as a painful envelope into which he had to crawl; he had to animate it, stand up, stretch arms and legs. The boy's wound was still so vividly in his mind that he waited, head forward, listening. Listening for what?

The mountains lay in heavy silence and when he began to walk again the fragments of rock crackled like fire under his feet. In ten minutes he found a spring. The water was numbingly cold and washing in it, drinking it, was to be shocked into a more normal attitude toward his body. It was a restoration to life. He thought of Lazarus walking out of his tomb. My heart beats! My lungs fill with air! My bowels work! Bowman looked at his watch and saw that it was already three o'clock.

The hotel was on the other side of the valley at roughly his own altitude. The plan was now to walk, without losing height, round the head of the valley to the road which would bring him through the village and so home. How extraordinary was the mere fact of being alive, he thought; to be following a blue shadow over gray rock; and to see that this same gray rock, in the distance and under the sun, was not gray at all but blue and milk. Birds hung in the air. But they were *below* him. Bowman marched toward the head of the valley, looking down at the birds from time to time and thinking that if he had died as he lay sleeping he could have enjoyed no greater sense of release. He made good time. By five o'clock he had rounded the top of the valley. By six, with the village behind him, he was walking along the road behind a herd of she-goats.

"Hiyi! Hiyi!" There were plenty of people about. There was the boy driving the goats, there was a man with a tarboosh riding an ass, youths in black cotton breeches were winnowing barley with huge wooden forks, tossing the grain into the air. There were so many people about that Bowman thought the shouting could not be intended for him.

"Hiyi! Hiyi!" Bowman lifted his head and saw the Poles coming down the side of the mountain, the girl riding sidesaddle on a brown donkey which was being led by its peasant owner. The Poles had seen him and were waving.

"Hiyi!" the American Pole called. "She has decided!"

Where was the boy Hubicki? Bowman looked back along the track they had followed. The sun was sinking and the thin mountain air had some of the sharpness of night. The sunward faces of the limestone boulders were flushed with gold; the lichens caught the color and held it. Dust from the donkey's hoofs still hung the length of the track. Over the shoulder of the mountain was a pink cloud.

"She has decided," said Skowierski as soon as they had paid off the peasant and the donkey was scampering back the way it had come. The Pole was so excited he took Bowman by the arm and the girl smiled at his excitement.

"Oui! C'est décidé," she said, standing quite motionless, the sun flooding into her face. The skin was golden as the rocks.

"Where's Hubicki, or whatever the hell it is you call him?"

"Hubicki?"

"Yes, the boy! Where's the boy?"

"Ce n'était pas Hubicki. J'ai choisi Skowierski."

You bitch! he thought. You beautiful bitch! The blood was vigorous under the sun-flushed skin; he saw her as a column of palpitating blood, triumphant.

"Where's Hubicki?"

"He went on to Afka," said Skowierski quickly. "You see, we didn't go to Afka. Maria made her decision and Hubicki went on alone. That was right, wasn't it? From that valley there is transport. He will go down to Beyrouth. We shall send his gear."

"He went alone?"

"Naturally he was disappointed."

"He went alone at this time of night?"

"This was at midday. Why do you worry?"

Skowierski took Maria by the arm and would have urged her gently in the direction of the hotel but she had something to say to Bowman first. "He is happy as any of us. He is happy as we are happy. It is the marriage of two Poles, that is what Hubicki is saying. He'll send us presents from Beyrouth."

"This is none of my business."

"You are the only other European at the hotel."

To avoid walking back to the hotel with them, listening to their absurd comments on their absurd situation, Bowman returned to the village café where he had eaten the night before. After his second *arak* he went into the kitchen to ask the cook-proprietor what transport ran up the Adonis valley.

"To Afka?" The man was sitting in a corner, grinding coffee. "There is no autobus. But plenty ordinary traffic. Big hotel. In those hills there are still bears, you know."

"Bears?"

"A village girl shot one three, four years ago."

Several times on his way to the hotel Bowman checked himself at the point of stepping over the edge of the road. He would have come to no serious harm; he might have rolled twenty feet or so into some wall or boulder. But naturally the darkness slowed him down.

Everyone was in the dining room when he arrived; and while he took a shower, with the round window flung open so that he could watch the moon climb up from the direction of Damascus, he heard the clatter of crockery. He dressed carefully, even formally: Sam Browne and medal ribbons. Then he marched down to the dining room, ignored the head waiter's invitation to a secluded table, and placed himself without so much as a word in Hubicki's empty chair. Skowierski threw his head back in astonishment. The girl smiled.

"I'm going to telephone the provost marshal in Beyrouth about you people," said Bowman. "I think we've got to know just what's going on. Now, let me see your leave passes."

The search for Hubicki went on for the best part of a week. Bowman made the journey to Afka twice in three days, following the lip of the limestone cliff the first time and clambering through the debris at its foot the second. Afka itself was spectacular. An enormous cirque, studded with juniper, hung over the cave, the jet of water, the grove of trees and the dark gorge of Adonis. The head man of the village, carrying a beautifully carved ceremonial ax, conducted Bowman to the few pillars that were all that remained of the temple. A fig tree, trembling in the spray, grew at the mouth of the cave.

No one had seen Hubicki or remembered him. He had not checked in at any of the hotels in the valley; he had not been noticed in Byblos; he had not returned to his unit in Beyrouth. The military, Polish and British alike, were not particularly worried. After all the fellow was on leave. Nevertheless, a lieutenant in the Polish Military Police drove up in a jeep one afternoon and took Skowierski and all Hubicki's kit back to Beyrouth with him. For that one night Maria and Bowman were the only Europeans in the hotel.

After dinner Bowman saw her leave the hotel and walk toward the rocks where they had thrown stones at the bottle. He lit a cigar and followed. The flank of Saneen was jet over the rising moon; the tall rocks became a city in the kindling of starlight: ruined baroque skyscrapers, wind-scoured temples, hangars, mansions and flowers in limestone. She saw that he was following and stopped.

"D'you mean what you say about marrying him?" Bowman asked bluntly.

She did not answer.

"You can't, you see? Not good enough for you. For God's sake, girl, you don't marry a man because he's your own nationality."

"I do."

"What about your family?"

"The Germans shot them."

"Your father wouldn't want you to marry Skowierski."

"What do you know about my father?"

"More than you do. I'm just about his age." Bowman took the cigar from his lips. "I say that regretfully. You're a very beautiful and desirable girl. Take my tip. Wait until the war's over, go home to Poland and then get married."

"The war will never be over. At least, I shall be an old woman. After the Germans there are the Russians."

She spoke better French than he did. He wondered about her background; father in the professional classes, a doctor maybe, or even a university teacher.

"Where d'you think the boy Hubicki has got to?" When she made no answer he said, "Shall I tell you where I reckon he is? Dead! When it came to the pinch you were just a girl to him, not Mother Poland."

"Hubicki's not dead," she said witheringly. "He is a Pole. You do not understand Poles. If you had understood Poles you would not have telephoned Beyrouth and Skowierski would still have been here. You saw that we were happy and it made you jealous and angry. Oh yes, I saw the look on your face."

And he saw the look on her face! Tears glittered in the moon. Her expression had become calm with anger; a mask, silver but ardent for self-sacrifice. "I would marry a Pole if there was only one left in the world; if he was a monster, I would marry him."

"I'm beginning to think the worse Skowierski is the better you'll like marrying him."

"You know nothing about Poland. Hubicki is all right. He will turn up."

Bowman was at the hotel entrance when the prophecy was fulfilled. The *Poste,* the daily autobus from Beyrouth, arrived at about three in the afternoon, bringing, this particular trip, only two passengers: Skowierski and Hubicki! They had a canvas bag full of bottles and when Skowierski saw the hotel manager he lifted it up, shouting, "Everyone drinks for my *fiançailles.*" He was flushed with drink himself and when Maria flew out of the hotel and into his arms he dropped the bag with such a thump that *arak* dripped into the white dust and the air reeked of aniseed.

"You are all my guests," Skowierski shouted, grinning when he caught sight of Bowman.

Hubicki was certainly not drunk. He smiled when Maria kissed him, looked at her quizzically and then, blushing slightly, kissed her in return, firmly on the lips. His eyebrows went up and down, almost as though he was giving himself a mock reproof. They linked arms, Maria in the middle, laughing more boisterously than before Hubicki had disappeared, but with the same joy.

"Everyone will drink with us," cried Skowierski, lifting the dripping canvas bag.

During the course of the evening Bowman learned (not directly, but from the manager) that Hubicki had been taken in by some Armenian village where they thought he was a deserter and made a great fuss over him. He had had the time of his life. *Arak,* fresh figs with the chill of morning still upon them, yogurt, roast mutton, cup upon cup of sweet, black coffee. It had been difficult to get away.

No, Bowman thought, this just could not be. This was not life. Innocence was dead. All this rejoicing was quite empty. To be happy because a Pole was marrying a Pole? What did it all mean? What did it mean to sleep at night? In two years he would be fifty. His wife was already past childbearing. They would never have children. How could anyone live as though—well, as though it were still the Golden Age?

Someone had been wounded. From someone's side the blood rose like a spring. How could a man take such an injury and live?

There was a knock on the door. A servant had brought a bottle of Cypriot brandy with the compliments of Corporal Skowierski.

How could I lose so much blood and live? thought Bowman as he pulled out the cork.

The Walker

by PATRICK O'BRIAN

In the country around this village it is not as simple as one could wish to find a pleasant, easy path for walking. The roads inland are all uphill, and although it is true that they lead through magnificent, dramatic country—bold, falling rock with terraces of vines and olive trees standing among the dried-up, barren mountains—they are roads that have to be climbed with attention: the landscape makes continual demands upon one; the winding, rock-strewn paths need perpetual care, and both these things interfere with the real aim of a walk, which for me is a half-conscious gentle physical exercise, the perfect accompaniment to reflection. I do not say that the countryside is anything but superb, and for one who walks to see magnificence these paths are ideal: but that is not my aim, and sometimes I long for an ordinary sober country lane, a way through the level cornfields or a towpath along a quiet river or a sea-wall between salt flats and a marsh. Then there is the heat: for a big, heavy man that is important, and in the summer (it lasts from April to November here) all these roads are tilted to the blazing sun throughout the day.

The alternative is to walk along the sea. It is fresher in the summer, but there again it is not the kind of walking that I like best, for the sea is bordered by high cliffs: the sea comes right to their feet, and there is no way along the shore; one must be climbing or descending all the time.

When I was a little boy I lived for a time in a place where there was an immense stretch of sand, hard, pounded sand upon which you could walk for miles and miles. You never had to watch your feet on the level sand: walking was effortless, and the rhythm of your steps and the half-heard incessant thunder of the sea induced that trance in which one can go on and on forever, singing perhaps, or talking to the air. There were shells, too, far better than the shells are here, delicately stranded at the watermark, and all kinds of sea-wrecked things, trawlers' floats, kelp, sea purses, spindrift, tarred or whitened planks of wood.

That is the sort of beach or strand that is lacking here; for here, as I say, there is no way along the sea except by the cliffs, and although they do sometimes go down to a little bay of shingle, it is only to rise again abruptly within a hundred yards. It is not a coast for general wandering: it is not a shore where one can stroll at all, and that is my only complaint against this place. I have no others. My lodgings are clean and orderly, the people are used to me, they are quiet and civil, and nobody interferes with my work or my set habits.

However, there is one walk that is neither violent nor exhausting. It is not a very good walk: it is an illogical, synthetic walk, but it is the best that I have been able to find and I have gone over the paths of it so often now that my feet find their way by themselves, leaving my mind free, to meditate or drift in vacancy, just as it pleases: and that is all that one can ask.

I go out of the back of the village, past the fort: this is a bad part, for the quarter's rubbish dump is by the fort, and there is always a carrion smell and the thin dogs hunt about in shameful, mean-looking bands. The rubbish is supposed to be burned in that square concrete box, but although a cloud of stinking smoke drifts over it, the amount is never the less. I pass it and hurry over the bare drying-ground: the wind is almost always in the right direction, and as soon as I am on the level field the reek is blown away, so by the time I am halfway over it the unpleasant feeling has quite gone. This is the place where the women spread their washing out to dry, and in certain months of the year the men bring their nets to lie in the sun.

Beyond the drying-field one must branch off to the left, to the main road and follow it to the entrance of a broad cart track: this is where the walk begins. The track dips down between high banks, and very soon there are hedges on either side. These are the only hedges for miles around, and if it were not for the prickly pears that show here and there and the pomegranates that form part of the hedge itself, one might suppose the track an English lane. On the far side there are orange trees and vines, which destroy the effect, but all around the farmhouse that stands on the downward slope an ordinary market garden gives the green in ordered rows again—broad beans, cauliflowers and cabbages, lettuce, carrots, familiar plants. Farther down, the bushes close overhead and the lane becomes a tunnel through the green; then at the bottom there is the river. For nearly all the year the bed is dry, and even when there is some water flowing it is always possible to cross dry-shod. Now I turn to the right and follow the path downstream. Here there are laurels, a few willows, tamarisks and those tall, thin bushes that have purple sprays of flowers—the kind that bloom in the late summer and draw flights of peacock butterflies.

Among the bushes there are dragonflies, for the river, flowing underground, leaves stagnant pools in the hollows: and up and down the river bed, low under the trees, innumerable swallows dash through the light; there are martins, too, and in the evening, when the bats are out and the swallows are no more than dark blurs, more sensed than seen, the white bottoms of the martins show, disembodied, weaving up and down.

I follow the river then, and come to its mouth. This is in one of the little bays that I have mentioned: it stands between the cliffs on either hand, a half-moon of shingle, with tall reeds at the back of it and behind them an orchard of fig and orange trees. The river, when it is flowing, hugs the right-hand side, cutting along at the foot of the cliff itself, and the beach shows no sign of having a river in it at all.

It is a shingle beach, with large pebbles at the back and small ones by the sea. Nearly always there is a high-water mark of broken reeds, bushes, driftwood and grass-like seaweed: this line of vegetable rubbish (it is as much as two feet high sometimes) stays unmoved from one big storm to another. Only at the equinox, when the wind comes straight in from the sea, do the waves beat in so far, and then there is nearly always rain inland, so that the river brings down more dead reeds and bushes, and these, being unable to drive out to sea, drift in the little bay and are thrown in to the same high-water mark.

It is only at these times, too, that the one boat that lives on that beach is hauled up far from the sea. It is a blue boat, shaped like those one made from paper as a child; the old man of the orchard uses it to fish for congers. He spends more time in his boat than working on his land, and it is said that he knows the rocks at the bottom of that bay better than most men know the rooms of the house they live in. But he is a savage old man, a solitary, and I do not speak to him nor he to me.

When I am on the beach I usually walk up and down it. It is not that it is agreeable to walk upon—the shingle is so loose and shifting that one's feet plunge deep and walking is painful—but it is the end of my walk. One must either go back the way one came (an unsatisfactory retreat) or else climb up the cliff, which is not walking any more. It is the cliff path that I nearly always take, up past the destroyed German searchlight and to the huge domed gun-emplacements home; but I walk up and down first to consider it.

I walk, naturally, by whatever watermark there may be. Not the high ridgelike mark of the great storms, for that so rarely changes, but by the sea itself: and sometimes, when there has been a swell, or a storm in Africa, there are shells or wreckage on the beach.

Once I found a wet brass ring. It had just arrived from who knows what rolling in the sea. It was a cheap ring, the kind that is sold in fairs: the sea had pitted it with eatings-out and dents, which gave it the look of vast antiquity. But in low relief on the flat part of it there was a swastika, and no doubt it had belonged to one of the Germans drowned here in the war. The ring filled me with repulsion, like a thing unclean: the round was so much the answering shape to the finger that had fitted it that I shuddered and threw it far into the sea, wiping my hands on the pebbles afterward. A human finger, by itself without a hand, is a disgusting thing. A human finger in the sea.

The pelvis that I found did not have the same effect. It was not long after the ring, and it lay within a yard or two of the place where I had picked it up: but I did not connect it with the Germans drowned—nor, indeed, with mankind at all.

It was by itself, white, dry and smooth, symmetrical and polished to inhumanity by the sea. It was only by a conscious effort that I could feel that this had been a piece of a man—only by running my hand round my own hip to spine and tracing the same rise and curve that I saw on the bleached and diagrammatic bone in front of me. It had been in some way human, that was true: but is a shell the shellfish? This pelvis was very like a shell. Ordinarily, I suppose, a human bone would raise some emotion, some emotion resembling piety; it would be a disturbance of decency, a kind of profanation on the shore. But I felt no such emotion as I sat looking at this bone: I connected it with death, but with no particular death. A specimen in an anatomical museum could more easily have been clothed with living flesh than this white basin in the sun.

One's mental processes, and especially the wandering fantasies that pass through one's mind as one walks, are linked by a chain of association so slight that it usually cannot be traced. A bramble will claw out from a thicket: one pushes on automatically, and then in half an hour one will find that one has been dwelling on the Passion for the last mile of the road. That is why I speak of this bone: it provides the obvious and unfortuitous start for the recollections that unfolded in my head as I walked up the cliff path and high along the edge of the sea to the ruined batteries, where the camouflaged concrete still lies among the thistles and the asphodel, with its reinforcing steel rods all standing like the prickles of some prodigious monster of the earth.

When first I came to this village I lodged in a house belonging to an elderly couple named Joseph and Martine Albère. It was a large house, but I was the only lodger: it was a tall, gaunt place, always cold and damp, even in the height of the summer, and from the outside you would have said that it was uninhabited. But it was in good repair, a solid, middle-class house, much richer than the terrace-cottages in which most of the villagers lived: only the presbytery and the doctor's house were better; and from this I judged that the owner would be a man of some standing in the village. I learned, too, that my landlord was the owner and the equipper, the *armateur*, as they say, of three fishing boats: his boats, then, were the direct means of livelihood for nearly forty of the men of the place—a considerable proportion of the working inhabitants.

However, I soon gathered the impression that Albère was not a man of high standing. It is difficult to say how one forms an impression of this nature: it is built up of so many little things—gestures, tones of voice, a look cast backward, an avoiding eye—but in the end it grows into certainty. On the concrete, demonstrable side there was the fact that he never ran for municipal office, that he was president of none of the many co-operative or political associations, and that he never appeared at any of the funerals or public feasts.

He seemed to be rich but unconsidered: a contradiction of common experience. At one time I asked myself whether in fact he was rich. Would a rich man take in a lodger? He did not seem to like letting the room I had; but when upon some trifling disagreement (he did not allow his lodgers the front-door key) I suggested that I should find a room elsewhere, he showed so much concern that I could not but suppose he was in earnest. He at once proposed a much lower rent if I would give up my point, and after a little more discussion I agreed to stay. This caused him a disproportionate satisfaction.

Then I learned that he had a fourth boat building on the stocks, which disposed of my idea that he was poor, for at that time a new boat was a very costly undertaking. As for the letting of rooms, that might indicate much or little: after all, in a big house one might let rooms to keep the house lived in, simply to prevent that decay that always comes in an empty place.

But still he remained a curious man to me. He did not like me, and he did not like having me in the house: yet he did not want me to leave it. The rent that I paid was a trifle to him even before he reduced it, yet he forced himself to be amiable to me, provided my room with the meager best of the furniture in the house, and waited up every night to let me in after my evening walk.

He was a small, dark man, about sixty-five years of age: he was always carelessly dressed, dirty and unshaved, and his air of brutality contrasted strangely with the house he lived in. How did this brutal air appear? He was not obviously vicious: he spoke politely enough to me (though it was patently constrained) and I can only say that it must have been his lurching walk, the set expression on his face and the way he terrorized his wife that made me think, "Albère? A brutish man." His wife I hardly saw: she was utterly effaced, and she moved about the darkened house furtively, with the sound of a person who is trying to make no noise—this was when she was going about her obvious, everyday duties. She was much more like an imprisoned servant than the mistress of the house. Whenever she spoke to me he would appear and, whatever she was saying, she would stop and hurry downstairs. Yet I had the impression that in spite of this domination they were allies. Sometimes, in the dead quiet of night, I would hear them talking, two whispers, urgent and hurrying, that would answer one to the other in the basement of the house. They slept in the kitchen, and I do not think they ever used any other room.

When I had been there some time I learned something of their habits. They did not sleep very much, and every few hours one or another of them (or sometimes both) would creep up to the top of the house, along the passage that traversed its length, opening every door softly and softly closing it again, then down the stairs to the middle landing, very silently past my door to the room beyond, and there they would pause, perhaps for as long as half an hour, before coming out, crossing quietly to the other side of the house, back to the stairs and so down again to the hall and their kitchen.

But I have my nocturnal habits, too: and more than once I have been there before them, fixed silent in a corner just off their trodden beat (for their patrol was so settled by long routine that their feet stepped in exactly the same places night after night), silent and unbreathing, watching their shadows.

However, this was much later: at first I merely noted that they never left the house together, and that when one was gone the other always waited in the hall or near it to open the door.

They appeared to have no relations. At least nobody ever came to visit them; and as far as I could see they were always in the house except when Albère was on the beach, conducting his business with the crews of his boats or when the woman was out for shopping. She never went to church: nor, of course, did he.

I had been there a long time before I found out what was the matter with them. It was a long time, for there were two difficulties in my way: one was that the people of the village were not unduly open—they may know something for generations, but will not go out of their way to tell strangers—and the other, that I do not talk readily either: I do not go to cafés nor make acquaintance with the loungers on the quay. My form of recreation after my work is to walk. I like to go for long, uninterrupted walks.

Eventually it was a Dutch painter who told me what I had to know. He was a fat, exuberant man—spoke the language perfectly, having been brought up in Rheims—and he almost forced himself upon me. All he wanted was an audience: he loved to talk, and the smallest word of attention would keep him talking on the quay for hours. He was not my idea of a Dutchman. He knew all the fishermen and all the shopkeepers: he was hail-fellow-well-met with all of them before he had been here a month, and he stayed for a long time. It was a local man who told him about Albère; or perhaps "local man" is inexact, for he was a waiter who had married a local girl and settled down here: he did not have the same sense of a closed community. The facts were common knowledge, and I often came across references to them afterward. Albère was originally a sailor, a seaman employed on the packet boats that run between France and North Africa. On his ship, the *Jules-Bastide,* there were two other men from this village.

One night, about thirty years ago, the *Jules-Bastide* put out from Marseilles in a black gale of wind: there were very few passengers, for it was midwinter, and most of those few went straight to their cabins. Only a few Algerian deck passengers huddled on the fo'c'sle, and one solitary priest, indifferent to the weather, stayed on the afterdeck. He carried a black valise wherever he went. When he went below for dinner he kept it with him, and afterward, when he returned to the deck, in spite of the wild seas, he carried it still. He paced up and down in the gale, always carrying this valise. There were three men on duty on this part of the ship at this particular time, Albère and his two fellow-villagers.

In the morning the priest was missing. Nobody knew anything about it: the official inquiry revealed nothing whatever. There was even some mystery about the identity of the priest, as there had been a mistake in the list of passengers, and the person who had arranged for the priest's ticket could not be traced.

Shortly afterward the three men left the sea. One bought a café in the town ten miles up the coast; the second took an important farm some way inland; and Albère bought the house where I was staying and the three fishing boats.

Within a year the first man and his wife were burned alive in a fire that destroyed their house and café. Two years later the second man, already overcome by misfortune in all his enterprises, lost his only son; the boy was killed riding a motor bicycle that his father had bought for him. The man returned to this village by foot, walked to the graveyard and hanged himself in the daylight.

Ever since, the Albères had been waiting for their turn. They had taken me in as some kind of protection (the lightning, they thought, would not strike a house where a just man lived) but still they did not think that my presence was enough: they were still in dread, and I remembered how one night, early in my stay, I had gone out about three in the morning (I had thought that it might be the beginning of the day of wrath, but when I looked at the stars I found that I was wrong: I had been unable to move Aldebaran) and I had unbolted the door without a sound. When I came back and closed it after me, I heard the stifled gasp that Albère made as he stood silently behind the door, and in the moonlight from the landing window I saw that he had a gun. He muttered something about thieves, but, as I thought at the time, you shoot thieves down. Thieves had their hands cut off in former days; they were also stoned to death. Some thieves were nailed and hung up alive.

Nothing has ever given me a livelier pleasure than my realization that they had taken me in as a protection. And it came to me quite slowly, as I was walking by the river, that once again I had been chosen as the hand of God. After such a long time it had come again: all my anxious waiting was rewarded. The wickedness of my doubt was overlooked—for at times I had wavered—and now once again I was the elected vessel. I had hoped for so long: and to hope for such an election twice in one lifetime seemed indeed presumptuous. But now I was the hand of God again; the wrath of a jealous God Who spoke through the prophet and ploughed the Amalekites into the ground. And without my knowledge I had been set there in my place for a long year past: oh, it was the sweetest realization in the world, this kindness done to me.

Clearly I knew that it was not for the murder I had been sent: no, no; it was for accidie. These wicked people had despaired of all forgiveness: they had hardened their hearts, and for that last wickedness they were to be destroyed in this world as they were already damned in the next.

I waited for the dream that would direct my hand: it had been so clear before. It had been so clear and explicit, and twice repeated, on the last occasion, the sawing of the blasphemer in Newtonards. But it did not come at once this time, and in my lightness of spirits I could not sleep. It was between half-past three and four o'clock. They were on the upper corridor, together; and the spirit of delight was so strong in me that I could not resist the pleasure of running out with my black coat over my nakedness, barefoot up behind them. They were in the far room, listening; I was fast in the black shadow of the corner, and as they crept by I sprang on them shrieking, "The priest, the valise, the priest, ha ha ha ha ha." I leaped and sprang, but with the shrieking and the laughter I could hardly run as fast as they did. They were some way ahead, the man before the woman, and I am a very big, heavy man; but I cut them off at the head of the stairs and hunted them into the farthest room: I howled and howled in the room. And I let them escape me there while I ran to leap and shriek all through the house. Then I had them on the stairs half down, the man dragging the woman by the arm. They were trying to reach the door, and the laughing nearly choked my breath. From up there I flew, I say I *flew*, and smashed them down onto the far stone floor.

But it was finished then. It was finished almost before it had begun. I had meant a full night's inspired, enormous ecstasy, and I had wasted it in half an hour. Before it had started it was done: they had died without a mark; and I had not set the sign.

About this story Patrick O'Brian writes that it has two origins: "The first is a quotation from Psalm 91 which runs roughly, 'You shall not fear the terrors that come by night; nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the evils prepared in the shadows; nor the demon that destroys at noonday.' The Latin version speaks of the demon that walks *in the noonday sun, and that demon has always haunted my imagination as something particularly terrible. The second of these origins is a local legend about three seamen who* *robbed a priest and died horribly afterward. In 'The Walker' I combined these. The man who tells it is the devil who walks at noon and the evil which is prepared in the darkness: that is to say he is a man possessed by these devils, but who believes himself to be the instrument of God. The walking, you see, seems to me an essential part of his madness and his possession; and clearly the evil men of the local legend are precisely those who are to fear the horrors of the night, the arrow that flies by day, the wickedness in the shadows and the high-noon demon."*

Good Country People

by FLANNERY O'CONNOR

Besides the neutral expression that she wore when she was alone, Mrs. Freeman had two others, forward and reverse, that she used for all her human dealings. Her forward expression was steady and driving like the advance of a heavy truck. Her eyes never swerved to left or right but turned as the story turned as if they followed a yellow line down the center of it. She seldom used the other expression because it was not often necessary for her to retract a statement, but when she did, her face came to a complete stop, there was an almost imperceptible movement of her black eyes, during which they seemed to be receding, and then the observer would see that Mrs. Freeman, though she might stand there as real as several grain sacks thrown on top of each other, was no longer there in spirit. As for getting anything across to her when this was the case, Mrs. Hopewell had given it up. She might talk her head off. Mrs. Freeman could never be brought to admit herself wrong on any point. She would stand there and if she could be brought to say anything, it was something like, "Well, I wouldn't of said it was and I wouldn't of said it wasn't," or letting her gaze range over the top kitchen shelf where there was an assortment of dusty bottles, she might remark, "I see you ain't ate many of them figs you put up last summer."

They carried on their most important business in the kitchen at breakfast. Every morning Mrs. Hopewell got up at seven o'clock and lit her gas heater and Joy's. Joy was her daughter, a large blonde girl who had an artificial leg. Mrs. Hopewell thought of her as a child though she was thirty-two years old and highly educated. Joy would get up while her mother was eating and lumber into the bathroom and slam the door, and before long, Mrs. Freeman would arrive at the back door. Joy would hear her mother call, "Come on in," and then they would talk for a while in low voices that were indistinguishable in the bathroom. By the time Joy came in, they had usually finished the weather report and were on one or the other of Mrs. Freeman's daughters, Glynese or Carramae. Joy called them Glycerin and Caramel. Glynese, a redhead, was eighteen and had many admirers; Carramae, a blonde, was only fifteen but already married and pregnant. She could not keep anything on her stomach. Every morning Mrs. Freeman told Mrs. Hopewell how many times she had vomited since the last report.

Mrs. Hopewell liked to tell people that Glynese and Carramae were two of the finest girls she knew and that Mrs. Freeman was a *lady* and that she was never ashamed to take her anywhere or introduce her to anybody they might meet. Then she would tell how she had happened to hire the Freemans in the first place and how they were a godsend to her and how she had had them four years. The reason for her keeping them so long was that they were not trash. They were good country people. She had telephoned the man whose name they had given as a reference and he had told her that Mr. Freeman was a good farmer but that his wife was the nosiest woman ever to walk the earth. "She's got to be into everything," the man said. "If she don't get there before the dust settles, you can bet she's dead, that's all. She'll want to know all your business. I can stand him real good," he had said, "but me nor my wife neither could have stood that woman one more minute on this place." That had put Mrs. Hopewell off for a few days.

She had hired them in the end because there were no other applicants but she had made up her mind beforehand exactly how she would handle the woman. Since she was the type who had to be into everything, then, Mrs. Hopewell had decided, she would not only let her be into everything, she would *see to it* that she was into everything—she would give her the responsibility of everything, she would put her in charge. Mrs. Hopewell had no bad qualities of her own but she was able to use other people's in such a constructive way that she never felt the lack. She had hired the Freemans and she had kept them four years.

Nothing is perfect. This was one of Mrs. Hopewell's favorite sayings. Another was: that is life! And still another, the most important, was: well, other people have their opinions too. She would make these statements, usually at the table, in a tone of gentle insistence as if no one held them but her; and the large hulking Joy, whose constant outrage had obliterated every expression from her face, would stare just a little to the side of her, her eyes icy blue, with the look of someone who has achieved blindness by an act of will and means to keep it.

When Mrs. Hopewell said to Mrs. Freeman that life was like that, Mrs. Freeman would say, "I always said so myself." Nothing had been arrived at by anyone that had not first been arrived at by her. She was quicker than Mr. Freeman. When Mrs. Hopewell said to her after they had been on the place a while, "You know, you're the wheel behind the wheel," and winked, Mrs. Freeman had said, "I know it. I've always been quick. It's some that are quicker than others."

"Everybody is different," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"Yes, most people is," Mrs. Freeman said.

"It takes all kinds to make the world."

"I always said it did myself."

The girl was used to this kind of dialogue for breakfast and more of it for dinner; sometimes they had it for supper too. When they had no guest they ate in the kitchen because that was easier. Mrs. Freeman always managed to arrive at some point during the meal and to watch them finish it. She would stand in the doorway if it were summer but in the winter she would stand with one elbow on top of the refrigerator and look down on them, or she would stand by the gas heater, lifting the back of her skirt slightly. Occasionally she would stand against the wall and roll her head from side to side. At no time was she in any hurry to leave. All this was very trying on Mrs. Hopewell but she was a woman of great patience. She realized that nothing is perfect and that in the Freemans she had good country people and that if, in this day and age, you get good country people, you had better hang onto them.

She had had plenty of experience with trash. Before the Freemans she had averaged one tenant family a year. The wives of these farmers were not the kind you would want to be around you for very long. Mrs. Hopewell, who had divorced her husband long ago, needed someone to walk over the fields with her; and when Joy had to be impressed for these services, her remarks were usually so ugly and her face so glum that Mrs. Hopewell would say, "If you can't come pleasantly, I don't want you at all," to which the girl, standing square and rigid-shouldered with her neck thrust slightly forward, would reply, "If you want me, here I am—LIKE I AM."

Mrs. Hopewell excused this attitude because of the leg (which had been shot off in a hunting accident when Joy was ten). It was hard for Mrs. Hopewell to realize that her child was thirty-two now and that for more than twenty years she had had only one leg. She thought of her still as a child because it tore her heart to think instead of the poor stout girl in her thirties who had never danced a step or had any *normal* good times. Her name was really Joy but as soon as she was twenty-one and away from home, she had had it legally changed. Mrs. Hopewell was certain that she had thought and thought until she had hit upon the ugliest name in any language. Then she had gone and had the beautiful name, Joy, changed without telling her mother until after she had done it. Her legal name was Hulga.

When Mrs. Hopewell thought the name, Hulga, she thought of the broad blank hull of a battleship. She would not use it. She continued to call her Joy to which the girl responded but in a purely mechanical way.

Hulga had learned to tolerate Mrs. Freeman who saved her from taking walks with her mother. Even Glynese and Carramae were useful when they occupied attention that might otherwise have been directed at her. At first she had thought she could not stand Mrs. Freeman for she had found that it was not possible to be rude to her. Mrs. Freeman would take on strange resentments and for days together she would be sullen but the source of her displeasure was always obscure; a direct attack, a positive leer, blatant ugliness to her face—these never touched her. And without warning one day, she began calling her Hulga.

She did not call her that in front of Mrs. Hopewell who would have been incensed, but when she and the girl happened to be out of the house together, she would say something and add the name Hulga to the end of it, and the big, spectacled Joy-Hulga would scowl and redden as if her privacy had been intruded upon.

She considered the name her personal affair. She had arrived at it first purely on the basis of its ugly sound and then the full genius of its fitness had struck her. She had a vision of the name working like the ugly sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had to come when called. She saw it as the name of her highest creative act. One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into Joy, but the greater one was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga. However, Mrs. Freeman's relish for using the name only irritated her. It was as if Mrs. Freeman's beady steel-pointed eyes had penetrated far enough behind her face to reach some secret fact.

Something about her seemed to fascinate Mrs. Freeman and then one day Hulga realized that it was the artificial leg. Mrs. Freeman had a special fondness for the details of secret infections, hidden deformities, assaults upon children. Of diseases, she preferred the lingering or incurable. Hulga had heard Mrs. Hopewell give her the details of the hunting accident, how the leg had been literally blasted off, how she had never lost consciousness. Mrs. Freeman could listen to it any time as if it had happened an hour ago.

When Hulga stumped into the kitchen in the morning (she could walk without making the awful noise but she made it—Mrs. Hopewell was certain—because it was ugly-sounding), she glanced at them and did not speak. Mrs. Hopewell would be in her red kimono with her hair tied around her head in rags. She would be sitting at the table, finishing her breakfast, and Mrs. Freeman would be hanging by her elbow outward from the refrigerator, looking down at the table. Hulga always put her eggs on the stove to boil and then stood over them with her arms folded, and Mrs. Hopewell would look at her—a kind of indirect gaze divided between her and Mrs. Freeman—and would think that if she would only keep herself up a little, she wouldn't be so bad looking. There was nothing wrong with her face that a pleasant expression wouldn't help. Mrs. Hopewell said that people who looked on the bright side of things would be beautiful even if they were not.

Whenever she looked at Joy this way, she could not help but feel that it would have been better if the child had not taken the Ph.D. It had certainly not brought her out any and now that she had it, there was no more excuse for her to go to school again. Mrs. Hopewell thought it was nice for girls to go to school to have a good time but Joy had "gone through." Anyhow, she would not have been strong enough to go again.

The doctors had told Mrs. Hopewell that, with the best of care, Joy might see forty-five. She had a weak heart. Joy had made it plain that if it had not been for this condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people. She would be in a university lecturing to people who knew what she was talking about. And Mrs. Hopewell could very well picture her there, looking like a scarecrow and lecturing to more of the same. Here she went about all day in a six-year-old skirt and a yellow sweat shirt with a faded cowboy on a horse embossed on it. She thought this was funny: Mrs. Hopewell thought it was idiotic and showed simply that she was still a child.

She was brilliant but she didn't have a grain of sense. It seemed to Mrs. Hopewell that every year she grew less like other people and more like herself—bloated, rude and squint-eyed. And she said such strange things! To her own mother she had said—without warning, without excuse, standing up in the middle of a meal with her face purple and her mouth half full—"Woman! do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are *not?* God!" she had cried sinking down again and staring at her plate. "Malebranche was right: we are not our own light. We are not our own light!" Mrs. Hopewell had no idea to this day what brought that on. She had only made the remark, hoping Joy would take it in, that a smile never hurt anyone.

The girl had taken the Ph.D. in philosophy and this left Mrs. Hopewell at a complete loss. You could say, "My daughter is a nurse," or "My daughter is a schoolteacher," or even, "My daughter is a chemical engineer." You could not say, "My daughter is a philosopher." That was something that had ended with the Greeks and Romans. All day Joy sat on her neck in a deep chair, reading. Sometimes she went for walks but she didn't like dogs or cats or birds or flowers or nature or nice young men. She looked at nice young men as if she could smell their stupidity.

One day Mrs. Hopewell had picked up one of the books the girl had just put down and, opening it at random, she read, "Science, on the other hand, has to assert its soberness and seriousness afresh and declare that it is concerned solely with what-is. Nothing—how can it be for science anything but a horror and a phantasm? If science is right, then one thing stands firm: science wishes to know nothing of Nothing. Such is after all the strictly scientific approach to Nothing. We know it by wishing to know nothing of Nothing." These words had been underlined with a blue pencil and they worked on Mrs. Hopewell like some evil incantation in gibberish. She shut the book quickly and went out of the room as if she were having a chill.

This morning when the girl came in, Mrs. Freeman was on Carramae. "She thrown up four times after supper," she said, "and was up twice in the night after three o'clock. Yesterday she didn't do nothing but ramble in the bureau drawer. All she did. Stand up there and see what she could run up on."

"She's got to eat," Mrs. Hopewell muttered, sipping her coffee, while she watched Joy's back at the stove. She was wondering what the child had said to the Bible salesman. She could not imagine what kind of a conversation she could possibly have had with him.

He was a tall gaunt hatless youth who had called yesterday to sell them a Bible. He had appeared at the door, carrying a large black suitcase that weighted him so heavily on one side he had to brace himself against the door-facing. He seemed on the point of collapse but he said in a cheerful voice, "Good morning, Mrs. Cedars!" and set the suitcase down on the mat. He was not a bad-looking young man though he had on a bright blue suit and yellow socks that were not pulled up far enough. He had prominent face bones and a streak of sticky-looking brown hair falling across his forehead.

"I'm Mrs. Hopewell," she said.

"Oh!" he said, pretending to look puzzled but with his eyes sparkling. "I saw it said 'The Cedars,' on the mailbox so I thought you was Mrs. Cedars!" and he burst out in a pleasant laugh. He picked up the satchel and under cover of a pant, he fell forward into her hall. It was rather as if the suitcase had moved first, jerking him after it. "Mrs. Hopewell!" he said and grabbed her hand. "I hope you are well!" and he laughed again and then all at once his face sobered completely. He paused and gave her a straight earnest look and said, "Lady, I've come to speak of serious things."

"Well, come in," she muttered, none too pleased because her dinner was almost ready. He came into the parlor and sat down on the edge of a straight chair and put the suitcase between his feet and glanced around the room as if he were sizing her up by it. Her silver gleamed on the two sideboards; she decided he had never been in a room as elegant as this.

"Mrs. Hopewell," he began, using her name in a way that sounded almost intimate. "I know you believe in Chrustian service."

"Well, yes," she murmured.

"I know," he said and paused, looking very wise with his head cocked on one side, "that you're a good woman. Friends have told me."

Mrs. Hopewell never liked to be taken for a fool. "What are you selling?" she asked.

"Bibles," the young man said, and his eye raced around the room before he added, "I see you have no family Bible in your parlor. I see that is the one lack you got!"

Mrs. Hopewell could not say, "My daughter is an atheist and won't let me keep the Bible in the parlor." She said, stiffening slightly, "I keep my Bible by my bedside." This was not the truth. It was in the attic somewhere.

"Lady," he said, "the word of God ought to be in the parlor."

"Well, I think that's a matter of taste," she began. "I think . . ."

"Lady," he said, "for a Chrustian, the word of God ought to be in every room in the house besides in his heart. I know you're a Chrustian because I can see it in every line of your face."

She stood up and said, "Well, young man, I don't want to buy a Bible and I smell my dinner burning."

He didn't get up. He began to twist his hands and looking down at them, he said softly, "Well lady, I'll tell you the truth—not many people want to buy one nowadays and besides, I know I'm real simple. I don't know how to say a thing but to say it. I'm just a country boy." He glanced up into her unfriendly face. "People like you don't like to fool with country people like me!"

"Why!" she cried, "good country people are the salt of the earth! Besides, we all have different ways of doing, it takes all kinds to make the world go 'round. That's life!"

"You said a mouthful," he said.

"Why, I think there aren't enough good country people in the world!" she said, stirred. "I think that's what's wrong with it!"

His face had brightened. "I didn't inraduce myself," he said. "I'm Manley Pointer from out in the country around Willohobie, not even from a place, just from near a place."

"You wait a minute," she said. "I have to see about my dinner." She went out to the kitchen and found Joy standing near the door where she had been listening.

"Get rid of the salt of the earth," she said, "and let's eat."

Mrs. Hopewell gave her a pained look and turned the heat down under the vegetables. "I can't be rude to anybody," she murmured and went back into the parlor.

He had opened the suitcase and was sitting with a Bible on each knee.

"You might as well put those up," she told him. "I don't want one."

"I appreciate your honesty," he said. "You don't see any more real honest people unless you go way out in the country."

"I know," she said, "real genuine folks!" Through the crack in the door she heard a groan.

"I guess a lot of boys come telling you they're working their way through college," he said, "but I'm not going to tell you that. Somehow," he said, "I don't want to go to college. I want to devote my life to Chrustian service. See," he said, lowering his voice, "I got this heart condition. I may not live long. When you know it's something wrong with you and you may not live long, well then, lady . . ." He paused, with his mouth open, and stared at her.

He and Joy had the same condition! She knew that her eyes were filling with tears but she collected herself quickly and murmured, "Won't you stay for dinner? We'd love to have you!" and was sorry the instant she heard herself say it.

"Yes mam," he said in an abashed voice. "I would sher love to do that!"

Joy had given him one look on being introduced to him and then throughout the meal had not glanced at him again. He had addressed several remarks to her, which she had pretended not to hear. Mrs. Hopewell could not understand deliberate rudeness, although she lived with it, and she felt she had always to overflow with hospitality to make up for Joy's lack of courtesy. She urged him to talk about himself and he did. He said he was the seventh child of twelve and that his father had been crushed under a tree when he himself was eight years old. He had been crushed very badly; in fact, almost cut in two and was practically not recognizable. His mother had got along the best she could by hard working and she had always seen that her children went to Sunday School and that they read the Bible every evening. He was now nineteen years old and he had been selling Bibles for four months. In that time he had sold seventy-seven Bibles and had the promise of two more sales. He wanted to become a missionary because he thought that was the way you could do most for people. "He who losest his life shall find it," he said simply; and he was so sincere, so genuine and earnest that Mrs. Hopewell would not for the world have smiled. He prevented his peas from sliding onto the table by blocking them with a piece of bread which he later cleaned his plate with. She could see Joy observing sidewise how he handled his knife and fork and she saw too that, every few minutes, the boy would dart a keen appraising glance at the girl as if he were trying to attract her attention.

After dinner Joy cleared the dishes off the table and disappeared and Mrs. Hopewell was left to talk with him. He told her again about his childhood and his father's accident and about various things that had happened to him. Every five minutes or so she would stifle a yawn. He sat for two hours until finally she told him she must go because she had an appointment in town. He packed his Bibles and thanked her and prepared to leave, but in the doorway he stopped and wrung her hand and said that not on any of his trips had he met a lady as nice as her and he asked if he could come again. She had said she would always be happy to see him.

Joy had been standing in the road, apparently looking at something in the distance, when he came down the steps toward her, bent to the side with his heavy valise. He stopped where she was standing and confronted her directly. Mrs. Hopewell could not hear what he said but she trembled to think what Joy would say to him. She could see that after a minute Joy said something and that then the boy began to speak again, making an excited gesture with his free hand. After a minute Joy said something else at which the boy began to speak once more. Then to her amazement, Mrs. Hopewell saw the two of them walk off together, toward the gate. Joy had walked all the way to the gate with him and Mrs. Hopewell could not imagine what they had said to each other, and she had not yet dared to ask.

Mrs. Freeman was insisting upon her attention. She had moved from the refrigerator to the heater so that Mrs. Hopewell had to turn and face her in order to seem to be listening. "Glynese gone out with Harvey Hill again last night," she said. "She had this sty."

"Hill," Mrs. Hopewell said absently, "is that the one who works in the garage?"

"Nome, he's the one that goes to chiropracter school," Mrs. Freeman said. "She had this sty. Been had it two days. So she says when he brought her in the other night he says, 'Lemme get rid of that sty for you,' and she says, 'How?' and he says, 'You just lay yourself down acrost the seat of that car and I'll show you.' So she done it and he popped her neck. Kept on a-popping it several times until she made him quit. This morning," Mrs. Freeman said, "she ain't got no sty. She ain't got no traces of a sty."

"I never heard of that before," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"He ast her to marry him before the Ordinary," Mrs. Freeman went on, "and she told him she wasn't going to be married in no *office.*"

"Well, Glynese is a fine girl," Mrs. Hopewell said. "Glynese and Carramae are both fine girls."

"Carramae said when her and Lyman was married Lyman said it sure felt sacred to him. She said he said he wouldn't take five hundred dollars for being married by a preacher."

"How much would he take?" the girl asked from the stove.

"He said he wouldn't take five hundred dollars," Mrs. Freeman repeated.

"Well we all have work to do," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"Lyman said it just felt more sacred to him," Mrs. Freeman said. "The doctor wants Carramae to eat prunes. Says instead of medicine. Says them cramps is coming from pressure. You know where I think it is?"

"She'll be better in a few weeks," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"In the tube," Mrs. Freeman said. "Else she wouldn't be as sick as she is."

Hulga had cracked her two eggs into a saucer and was bringing them to the table along with a cup of coffee that she had filled too full. She sat down carefully and began to eat, meaning to keep Mrs. Freeman there by questions if for any reason she showed an inclination to leave. She could perceive her mother's eye on her. The first roundabout question would be about the Bible salesman and she did not wish to bring it on. "How did he pop her neck?" she asked.

Mrs. Freeman went into a description of how he had popped her neck. She said he owned a '55 Mercury but that Glynese said she would rather marry a man with only a '36 Plymouth who would be married by a preacher. The girl asked what if he had a '32 Plymouth and Mrs. Freeman said what Glynese had said was a '36 Plymouth.

Mrs. Hopewell said there were not many girls with Glynese's common sense. She said what she admired in those girls was their common sense. She said that reminded her that they had had a nice visitor yesterday, a young man selling Bibles. "Lord," she said, "he bored me to death but he was so sincere and genuine I couldn't be rude to him. He was just good country people, you know," she said, "—just the salt of the earth."

"I seen him walk up," Mrs. Freeman said, "and then later—I seen him walk off," and Hulga could feel the slight shift in her voice, the slight insinuation, that he had not walked off alone, had he? Her face remained expressionless but the color rose into her neck and she seemed to swallow it down with the next spoonful of egg. Mrs. Freeman was looking at her as if they had a secret together.

"Well, it takes all kinds of people to make the world go 'round," Mrs. Hopewell said. "It's very good we aren't all alike."

"Some people are more alike than others," Mrs. Freeman said.

Hulga got up and stumped, with about twice the noise that was necessary, into her room and locked the door. She was to meet the Bible salesman at ten o'clock at the gate.

She had thought about it half the night. She had started thinking of it as a great joke and then she had begun to see profound implications in it. She had lain in bed imagining dialogues for them that were insane on the surface but that reached below to depths that no Bible salesman would be aware of. Their conversation yesterday had been of this kind.

He had stopped in front of her and had simply stood there. His face was bony and sweaty and bright, with a little pointed nose in the center of it, and his look was different from what it had been at the dinner table. He was gazing at her with open curiosity, with fascination, like a child watching a new fantastic animal at the zoo, and he was breathing as if he had run a great distance to reach her. His gaze seemed somehow familiar but she could not think where she had been regarded with it before. For almost a minute he didn't say anything. Then on what seemed an insuck of breath, he whispered, "You ever ate a chicken that was two days old?"

The girl looked at him stonily. He might have just put this question up for consideration at the meeting of a philosophical association. "Yes," she presently replied as if she had considered it from all angles.

"It must have been mighty small!" he said triumphantly and shook all over with little nervous giggles, getting very red in the face, and subsiding finally into his gaze of complete admiration, while the girl's expression remained exactly the same.

"How old are you?" he asked softly.

She waited some time before she answered. Then in a flat voice she said, "Seventeen."

His smiles came in succession like waves breaking on the surface of a little lake. "I see you got a wooden leg," he said. "I think you're real brave. I think you're real sweet."

The girl stood blank and solid and silent.

"Walk to the gate with me," he said. "You're a brave sweet little thing and I liked you the minute I seen you walk in the door."

Hulga began to move forward.

"What's your name?" he asked, smiling down on the top of her head.

"Hulga," she said.

"Hulga," he murmured, "Hulga. Hulga. I never heard of anybody name Hulga before. You're shy, aren't you, Hulga?" he asked.

She nodded, watching his large red hand on the handle of the giant valise.

"I like girls that wear glasses," he said. "I think a lot. I'm not like these people that a serious thought don't ever enter their heads. It's because I may die."

"I may die too," she said suddenly and looked up at him. His eyes were very small and brown, glittering feverishly.

"Listen," he said, "don't you think some people was meant to meet on account of what all they got in common and all? Like they both think serious thoughts and all?" He shifted the valise to his other hand so that the hand nearest her was free. He caught hold of her elbow and shook it a little. "I don't work on Saturday," he said. "I like to walk in the woods and see what Mother Nature is wearing. O'er the hills and far away. Pic-nics and things. Couldn't we go on a pic-nic tomorrow? Say yes, Hulga," he said and gave her a dying look as if he felt his insides about to drop out of him. He had even seemed to sway slightly toward her.

During the night she had imagined that she seduced him. She imagined that the two of them walked on the place until they came to the storage barn beyond the two back fields and there, she imagined, things came to such a pass that she very easily seduced him and then, of course, she had to reckon with his remorse. True genius can get an idea across even to an inferior mind. She imagined that she took his remorse in hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life. She took all his shame away and turned it into something useful.

She set off for the gate at exactly ten o'clock, escaping without drawing Mrs. Hopewell's attention. She didn't take anything to eat, forgetting that food is usually taken on a picnic. She wore a pair of slacks and a dirty white shirt, and as an afterthought, she had put some Vapex on the collar of it since she did not own any perfume. When she reached the gate no one was there.

She looked up and down the empty highway and had the furious feeling that she had been tricked, that he had only meant to make her walk to the gate after the idea of him. Then suddenly he stood up, very tall, from behind a bush on the opposite embankment. Smiling, he lifted his hat which was new and wide-brimmed. He had not worn it yesterday and she wondered if he had bought it for the occasion. It was toast-colored with a red and white band around it and was slightly too large for him. He stepped from behind the bush still carrying the black valise. He had on the same suit and the same yellow socks sucked down in his shoes from walking. He crossed the highway and said, "I knew you'd come!"

The girl wondered acidly how he had known this. She pointed to the valise and asked, "Why did you bring your Bibles?"

He took her elbow, smiling down on her as if he could not stop. "You can never tell when you'll need the word of God, Hulga," he said. She had a moment in which she doubted that this was actually happening and then they began to climb the embankment. They went down into the pasture toward the woods. The boy walked lightly by her side, bouncing on his toes. The valise did not seem to be heavy today; he even swung it. They crossed half the pasture without saying anything and then, putting his hand easily on the small of her back, he asked softly, "Where does your wooden leg join on?"

She turned an ugly red and glared at him and for an instant the boy looked abashed. "I didn't mean you no harm," he said. "I only meant you're so brave and all, I guess God takes care of you."

"No," she said, looking forward and walking fast, "I don't even believe in God."

At this he stopped and whistled. "No!" he exclaimed as if he were too astonished to say anything else.

She walked on and in a second he was bouncing at her side, fanning with his hat. "That's very unusual for a girl," he remarked, watching her out of the corner of his eye. When they reached the edge of the wood, he put his hand on her back again and drew her against him without a word and kissed her heavily.

The kiss, which had more pressure than feeling behind it, produced that extra surge of adrenalin in the girl that enables one to carry a packed trunk out of a burning house, but in her, the power went at once to the brain. Even before he released her, her mind, clear and detached and ironic anyway, was regarding him from a great distance, with amusement but with pity. She had never been kissed before and she was pleased to discover that it was an unexceptional experience and all a matter of the mind's control. Some people might enjoy drain water if they were told it was vodka. When the boy, looking expectant but uncertain, pushed her gently away, she turned and walked on, saying nothing as if such business, for her, were common enough.

He came along panting at her side, trying to help her when he saw a root that she might trip over. He caught and held back the long swaying blades of thorn vine until she had passed beyond them. She led the way and he came breathing heavily behind her. Then they came out on a sunlit hillside, sloping softly into another one a little smaller. Beyond, they could see the rusted top of the old barn where the extra hay was stored.

The hill was sprinkled with small pink weeds. "Then you ain't saved?" he asked suddenly, stopping.

The girl smiled. It was the first time she had smiled at him at all. "In my economy," she said, "I'm saved and you are damned but I told you I didn't believe in God."

Nothing seemed to destroy the boy's look of admiration. He gazed at her now as if the fantastic animal at the zoo had put its paw through the bars and given him a loving poke. She thought he looked as if he wanted to kiss her again and she walked on before he had the chance.

"Ain't there somewheres we can sit down sometimes?" he murmured, his voice softening toward the end of the sentence.

"In that barn," she said.

They made for it rapidly as if it might slide away like a train. It was a large two-story barn, cool and dark inside. The boy pointed up the ladder that led into the loft and said, "It's too bad we can't go up there."

"Why can't we?" she asked.

"Yer leg," he said reverently.

The girl gave him a contemptuous look and putting both hands on the ladder, she climbed it while he stood below, apparently awestruck. She pulled herself expertly through the opening and then looked down at him and said, "Well, come on if you're coming," and he began to climb the ladder, awkwardly bringing the suitcase with him.

"We won't need the Bible," she observed.

"You never can tell," he said, panting. After he had got into the loft, he was a few seconds catching his breath. She had sat down in a pile of straw. A wide sheath of sunlight, filled with dust particles, slanted over her. She lay back against a bale, her face turned away, looking out the front opening of the barn where hay was thrown from a wagon into the loft. The two pink-speckled hillsides lay back against a dark ridge of woods. The sky was cloudless and cold blue. The boy dropped down by her side and put one arm under her and the other over her and began methodically kissing her face, making little noises like a fish. He did not remove his hat but it was pushed far enough back not to interfere. When her glasses got in his way, he took them off of her and slipped them into his pocket.

The girl at first did not return any of the kisses but presently she began to and after she had put several on his cheek, she reached his lips and remained there, kissing him again and again as if she were trying to draw all the breath out of him. His breath was clear and sweet like a child's and the kisses were sticky like a child's. He mumbled about loving her and about knowing when he first seen her that he loved her, but the mumbling was like the sleepy fretting of a child being put to sleep by his mother. Her mind, throughout this, never stopped or lost itself for a second to her feelings. "You ain't said you loved me none," he whispered finally, pulling back from her. "You got to say that."

She looked away from him off into the hollow sky and then down at a black ridge and then down farther into what appeared to be two green swelling lakes. She didn't realize he had taken her glasses but this landscape could not seem exceptional to her for she seldom paid any close attention to her surroundings.

"You got to say it," he repeated. "You got to say you love me."

She was always careful how she committed herself. "In a sense," she began, "if you use the word loosely, you might say that. But it's not a word I use. I don't have illusions. I'm one of those people who see *through* to nothing."

The boy was frowning. "You got to say it. I said it and you got to say it," he said.

The girl looked at him almost tenderly. "You poor baby," she murmured. "It's just as well you don't understand,"

and she pulled him by the neck, face-down, against her. "We are all damned," she said, "but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation."

The boy's astonished eyes looked blankly through the ends of her hair. "Okay," he almost whined, "but do you love me or don'tcher?"

"Yes," she said and added, "in a sense. But I must tell you something. There mustn't be anything dishonest between us." She lifted his head and looked him in the eye. "I am thirty years old," she said. "I have a number of degrees."

The boy's look was irritated but dogged. "I don't care," he said. "I don't care a thing about what all you done. I just want to know if you love me or don'tcher?" and he caught her to him and wildly planted her face with kisses until she said, "Yes, yes."

"Okay then," he said, letting her go. "Prove it."

She smiled, looking dreamily out on the shifty landscape. She had seduced him without even making up her mind to try. "How?" she asked, feeling that he should be delayed a little.

He leaned over and put his lips to her ear. "Show me where your wooden leg joins on," he whispered.

The girl uttered a sharp little cry and her face instantly drained of color. The obscenity of the suggestion was not what shocked her. As a child she had sometimes been subject to feelings of shame but education had removed the last traces of that as a good surgeon scrapes for cancer; she would no more have felt it over what he was asking than she would have believed in his Bible. But she was as sensitive about the artificial leg as a peacock about his tail. No one ever touched it but her. She took care of it as someone else would his soul, in private and almost with her own eyes turned away. "No," she said.

"I known it," he muttered, sitting up. "You're just playing me for a sucker."

"Oh no no!" she cried. "It joins on at the knee. Only at the knee. Why do you want to see it?"

The boy gave her a long penetrating look. "Because," he said, "it's what makes you different. You ain't like anybody else."

She sat staring at him. There was nothing about her face or her round freezing-blue eyes to indicate that this had moved her; but she felt as if her heart had stopped and left her mind to pump her blood. She decided that for the first time in her life she was face to face with real innocence. This boy, with an instinct that came from beyond wisdom, had touched the truth about her. When after a minute, she said in a hoarse high voice, "All right," it was like surrendering to him completely. It was like losing her own life and finding it again, miraculously, in his.

Very gently he began to roll the slack leg up. The artificial limb, in a white sock and brown flat shoe, was bound in a heavy material like canvas and ended in an ugly jointure where it was attached to the stump. The boy's face and his voice were entirely reverent as he uncovered it and said, "Now show me how to take it off and on."

She took it off for him and put it back on again and then he took it off himself, handling it as tenderly as if it were a real one. "See!" he said with a delighted child's face. "Now I can do it myself!"

"Put it back on," she said. She was thinking that she would run away with him and that every night he would take the leg off and every morning put it back on again. "Put it back on," she said.

"Not yet," he murmured, setting it on its foot out of reach. "Leave it off for a while. You got me instead."

She gave a little cry of alarm but he pushed her down and began to kiss her again. Without the leg she felt entirely dependent on him. Her brain seemed to have stopped thinking altogether and to be about some other function that it was not very good at. Different expressions raced back and forth over her face. Every now and then the boy, his eyes like two steel spikes, would glance behind him where the leg stood. Finally she pushed him off and said, "Put it back on me now."

"Wait," he said. He leaned the other way and pulled the valise toward him and opened it. It had a pale blue spotted lining and there were only two Bibles in it. He took one of these out and opened the cover of it. It was hollow and contained a pocket flask of whiskey, a pack of cards, and a small blue box with printing on it. He laid these out in front of her one at a time in an evenly spaced row, like one presenting offerings at the shrine of a goddess. He put the blue box in her hand.

"This product to be used only for the prevention of disease," she read, and dropped it. The boy was unscrewing the top of the flask. He stopped and pointed, with a smile, to the deck of cards. It was not an ordinary deck but one with an obscene picture on the back of each card. "Take a swig," he said, offering her the bottle first. He held it in front of her, but like one mesmerized, she did not move.

Her voice when she spoke had an almost pleading sound. "Aren't you," she murmured, "aren't you just good country people?"

The boy cocked his head. He looked as if he were just beginning to understand that she might be trying to insult him. "Yeah," he said, curling his lip slightly, "but it ain't held me back none. I'm as good as you any day in the week."

"Give me my leg," she said.

He pushed it farther away with his foot. "Come on now, let's begin to have us a good time," he said coaxingly. "We ain't got to know one another good yet."

"Give me my leg!" she screamed and tried to lunge for it but he pushed her down easily.

"What's the matter with you all of a sudden?" he asked, frowning as he screwed the top on the flask and put it quickly back inside the Bible. "You just a while ago said you didn't believe in nothing. I thought you was some girl!"

Her face was almost purple. "You're a Christian!" she hissed. "You're a fine Christian! You're just like them all—say one thing and do another. You're a perfect Christian, you're . . ."

The boy's mouth was set angrily. "I hope you don't think," he said in a lofty indignant tone, "that I believe in that crap! I may sell Bibles but I know which end is up and I wasn't born yesterday and I know where I'm going!"

"Give me my leg!" she screeched. He jumped up so quickly that she barely saw him sweep the cards and the blue box back into the Bible and throw the Bible into the valise. She saw him grab the leg and then she saw it for an instant slanted forlornly across the inside of the suitcase with a Bible at either side of its opposite ends. He slammed the lid shut and snatched up the valise and swung it down the hole and then stepped through himself.

When all of him had passed but his head, he turned and regarded her with a look that no longer had any admiration in it. "I've gotten a lot of interesting things," he said. "One time I got a woman's glass eye this way. And you needn't to think you'll catch me because Pointer ain't really my name. I use a different name at every house I call at and don't stay nowhere long. And I'll tell you another thing, Hulga," he said, using the name as if he didn't think much of it, "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!" and then the toast-colored hat disappeared down the hole and the girl was left, sitting on the straw in the dusty sunlight. When she turned her churning face toward the opening, she saw his blue figure struggling successfully over the green speckled lake.

Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman, who were in the back pasture, digging up onions, saw him emerge a little later from the woods and head across the meadow toward the highway. "Why, that looks like that nice dull young man that tried to sell me a Bible yesterday," Mrs. Hopewell said, squinting. "He must have been selling them to the Negroes back in there. He was so simple," she said, "but I guess the world would be better off if we were all that simple."

Mrs. Freeman's gaze drove forward and just touched him before he disappeared under the hill. Then she returned her attention to the evil-smelling onion shoot she was lifting from the ground. "Some can't be that simple," she said. "I know I never could."

Anchors

by FRANK O'CONNOR

My pal Mick Dowling started losing his faith very early, when he wasn't more than eighteen. I was sixteen at the time, and my feeling for him was one of complete devotion. It wasn't only that he was two years older than I; in character he was ten years older, mature, sedate, thoughtful and full of principle; while even when I reached his age I was still a creature of emotion, swayed by every fancy.

I had realized from the first that religion meant more to him than it did to any of his acquaintances, but it was only in easy stages (for he didn't like disturbing what he thought the convictions of a kid like myself) that he told me why. It came as a complete surprise to me. Never having seen him anything but thoughtful and industrious, it had never struck me that he was really a fellow of violent appetites and that but for the safeguards of religion he would turn into a monster. Naturally, I accepted these revelations as gospel; on consideration they made him even more interesting. Babiche Regan, the girl he walked out with, tended to make light of them, but that, Mick said, was only because she was so innocent and pure. I thought it was because she was really such a damn fool, though I didn't tell Mick that. Naturally, I didn't intend to let her rob Mick of his fascination for me, and continued to admire him as a marvel of self-control, being devoured from within by passions, though, as to myself, I didn't feel the conflict at all.

Now, of course, I realize that a lot of Mick's trouble was his mother. His father, except for a tendency to quarrel violently about politics, was a man of high character, and Mick worshiped him, but his mother was a constant irritation. She was a tall, thin, mournful-looking woman; still, because of her blue eyes and clear complexion, good-looking and attractive, but harried to death by work and piety. She had lost Mick's younger brother in childbirth, and, being incapable of having any more, brooded over it. She had no method, and was always losing or mislaying money, borrowing to make it up so that her husband wouldn't know, backing horses to repay the borrowings and taking sips of whisky on the side to nerve her for the final ordeal of "telling Dowling." No wonder the poor woman was in and out of churches all day, and trying to pump the sly ones with friends in the priesthood to tell her who were the best saints for a poor lone woman that was never out of trouble. If she worried about the souls of her husband and son, that was pure good nature on her part, because she had enough to worry about on her own account. All the same it riled Mick, particularly when she made novenas for him to pass his exams. It's not a nice thing at that age, when you work like the devil and everyone in the university recognizes your brilliance, to have all the credit go to the Infant Jesus of Prague or St. Rose of Lima.

"If I get ploughed," Mick told her angrily, "it'll be my fault, not St. Rose of Lima's."

"How sure you are of yourself!" she wailed with a smile like an April shower. "There's many would be glad of her help."

"Too many," Mick said. "If all the other mothers in Ireland are going on like you, she'll have a job to get all the candidates through."

Mrs. Dowling couldn't understand this intellectual sort of argument at all. She was a plain woman, who looked on Heaven as a glorified extension of the County Council, and the saints as councilors, going from department to department, looking after the interests of their relatives and friends. Some had more influence than others, of course. You could open the daily paper and there would be a list as long as your arm of acknowledgments of favors granted "on promise of publication," and by a simple process of counting on your fingers, you could see which of the saints had the most influence at the moment. If Mrs. Dowling ever dreamed of the saints, it must have been with horses' faces.

"Musha, if they were all praying together, 'twouldn't mean they'd all have their prayers answered," she said with a pitying smile.

"No," growled Mick, " 'twould mean there was favoritism in Heaven. But if you think the examiners are going to change their markings on account of St. Rose of Lima, you're much mistaken."

"Ah, we're all smart when we're your age," she said, driving Mick mad entirely.

Mick's father never interfered in these discussions, and for all the apparent interest he took in them, might just as well not have been listening. Mick told me he must have lost his mental edge very early in life. The only comment Mick could get out of him about religion was some blasting snarl at Father Dempsey, the P. P. whom he disliked as much as his wife liked him. Though Mick and his father always went to Mass together, they never went to the parish church for fear Mr. Dowling would be subjected to the ordeal of listening to Father Dempsey; they went to the Franciscan church in Sheares Street instead. The Franciscans had hidden Mr. Dowling during the Civil War, and he was a man who never forgot a kindness. After Mass they usually took a walk up the tree-lined Mardyke, over the bridge and back through the swanky suburb of Sunday's Well. Mick enjoyed these walks enormously, because they were the only occasions when he really had his father to himself and could tap the old man's fund of reminiscence and humor.

One Sunday Mick broke the news to him.

"There's something I want to say to you, Dad," he said gravely.

His father started. He didn't like the serious approach to anything. With his wife it always meant fresh losses, and his secret panic was that Mick might take after her.

"What is it?" he asked suspiciously.

"I don't think I can come to Mass with you any more."

"Why can't you?" his father asked in the same tone.

"Because I don't know that I believe in God any longer."

"You what?" snapped his father, stopping dead in his tracks.

This was what Mick had feared. He knew that when you touched the quick of his father's principle he reacted violently.

"I'm sorry," Mick said, growing red. "I was afraid it might upset you, but I can't help it. I have to try and hold on to what I think is the truth."

His father drew a deep breath through his nose, gave Mick a sharp look and then reached for his pipe. He went behind a tree to light it, and went on again, taking a couple of pulls as though to steady himself.

"I was afraid you were going to tell me something serious," he said with complete gravity.

Mick was surprised. He knew his father wasn't pietistic, but he had never seen him bend on a matter of principle. It made Mick suspicious.

"It's serious enough for me," he said.

"You're sure 'tis God and not Father Dempsey you don't believe in?" asked his father with a sideways look.

"What's the difference?" asked Mick.

"Oh, now, there's a big difference," replied his father warmly. "One is anticlericalism, a view taken only by the most religious people—myself for instance; the other is atheism—another view held by a lot of religious people."

Mr. Dowling had the same sort of poker-faced humor as Mick himself, though in him it was more sardonic, and Mick knew better than to take liberties with it. He knew he must draw his father out without making him blow up.

"Which is the best side for a religious chap to take?" he asked.

"Well," his father said slyly, "that would depend on how much you had to do with Dempsey."

"Oh, Dempsey," said Mick gloomily, "Dempsey is everywhere."

"Exactly!" said his father enthusiastically. "Dempsey is only an ignorant poor devil among people more ignorant than himself. That's why you mustn't mix up religious people and religion. You imagine 'tis religion you're up against when 'tis nothing only a lot of craw-thumping old women in a blooming provincial town."

"And where do you leave mother?" Mick asked with a grin.

"Where the betting left her," said his father. "With the also-rans. Your poor mother, you must be very patient with her. . . . But religion!" he went on with growing enthusiasm. "Religion is something bigger than all of them."

"I'm not sure that I know what you mean by religion," said Mick.

"What I mean by it?" his father said testily. " 'Tisn't what I mean by it at all. Damn it, boy, the best brains of the world have been hammering away at it for thousands of years, and you talk of what *I* mean by it."

"Well, I've only been hammering for six months so I have a lot of way to make up," Mick said good-humoredly. "What do you think I ought to do?"

"I think you ought to make sure what you're giving up before you do it," said his father hotly, "and not be coming to me in a couple of months' time and telling me you've made some astounding discovery that you could have found in a penny catechism. Then, if you want to quit, I won't try to stop you. You ought to know that."

"I know that," Mick said solemnly, "and that's the very reason I don't want to do anything without getting your advice."

"Oh, advice!" said his father. "I'm not a proper person to advise you. I'm out of touch. You ought to get hold of some intelligent priest, some young fellow with a bit of imagination, and talk to him. There's little Father Felim in the Franciscans, for instance; he has his head screwed on. There ought to be a couple of books at home too."

This was the first Mick had ever heard of religious books in the home, apart from some detestable tracts. His father searched for them among a pile of old papers and pamphlets in the attic, secret newspapers from the days of the fighting, election handbills, broadsheet ballads—his father's wild oats. Mr. Dowling lost himself among them. "There's the account of poor Mick Tracy's trial," he said. "You ought to read that. Mick Tracy was a great man, God rest him." He had lost interest in the books by the time he found them. They must have been secondhand even when he got them first; a handbook of dogmatic theology, a couple of volumes of Newman and a study of St. Thomas Aquinas. The very look of them gave Mick a shock for they revealed a side of his father that he had never known. One was heavily underlined, and the underlinings alone would have fascinated Mick. His father grinned when he saw them and started flicking over the pages. "That's well written," he said. "You ought to like that. Pretty tough going, though. Ah, Pascal is the fellow you'll have to get hold of. Pascal was the boy for them." He read a couple of the passages he had underlined, and his face took on an air of reverent wonder. He nodded once or twice but the nod was more by way of salute to his past than anything else.

However strange Joe Dowling of twenty years before might be to Mick, he was just as strange to himself, and it made him uneasy. It was now clear that he felt he had discharged his responsibilities as a father, and didn't propose to do anything more.

So far as Mick was concerned, he had. He started learning whole pages by heart, and then read outward through religious journalism like Chesterton's to the Modernists, whose brilliance delighted him though he approved their condemnation. He lent the books to me in the spirit of a confirmed gambler who lends money to his opponent in order to play with him. Though I shirked the more exacting of the religious exercises that Mick indulged in, I was intellectually game.

But as always between Mick and me, it went far deeper than that in him. He had thought he was all alone in his doubts and difficulties, and the discovery that he shared them with great thinkers of all ages calmed the tumult in his mind, and brought out a new and happier side of him. He had always been naturally kind, but, because he was rather ashamed of it, he had made a convention of strength of mind. Now that he had found another source of strength, a real one this time, the convention was superseded. He was no longer ashamed of being seen coming up the road with one ragged child riding on his neck and another swinging from his arm.

Just because his mother had always been such a trial to him he felt it his duty to be particularly kind to her, and even to take her part when she disagreed with his father. On his way to early Mass, he lit the fire for her and made her a cup of tea. She replied by doing everything to make his kindnesses even more meritorious by her suspicion of them. It was a most extraordinary thing, but the one person you would have expected to be pleased at Mick's conversion was the one who wasn't pleased at all. I could see that for myself. When she answered the door for me one evening I called for Mick, she gave me a smile like a bog at evening and said, "He's gone out to Benediction."

"Is it at the Augustinians?" I asked, determined on finding him.

"I dare say," she said, giving her upper lip a mournful hitch. "He's getting so religious you wouldn't know where he'd be."

"Well," I said encouragingly, "you know wherever he is, he'll be all right."

"I hope so, indeed," she said despairingly.

She left me under a strong impression that she did not approve of men saving their own souls, and that, like cooking, this was something that should be done for them by their womenfolk. He didn't, fortunately, take his finals into his own hands, and contented himself with suggesting gently that she should give the favorites a rest and try an outsider.

"Why don't you try someone who might be interested in education?" he asked with a smile. "St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance."

"Who was he?" his mother asked wearily (by this time she had convinced herself that Mick was making up saints just to annoy her).

"He happened to be the greatest intellect of the Church," said Mick.

"Was it he wrote that old book you were reading?" she asked.

"It was not," said Mick.

"Wouldn't you think if he was so great that someone would find it out before this?" she asked.

Mick gave up telling her about the lives of his favorite saints. He realized that his father was right, and that his mother's brand of Catholicism was not of a strictly orthodox kind. But he couldn't take it philosophically as his father did. He worried over it. She gave him even greater cause for worry. She had never really been able to get over the loss of Mick's brother. She had, in fact, created a sort of fantasy life for him into which she retreated in fits of depression. She had nursed him through serious illnesses, sent him to school, comforted him in various troubles. He had no clear outline in her mind except that he didn't in any way resemble Mick. Naturally, he had shown a vocation from the earliest age, become a priest and was expected to be a bishop. He would close her eyes in death, and afterward, by his prayers, give her soul a clear lead on those of the sly ones with inside knowledge who had begrudged a poor lone woman a tip about the saints.

"Ah, he's better off among the holy angels in Heaven," she said one day when again she was resigning herself to the hard blows of the world.

Mick gave her a sharp look. He had often heard the words before but had never attached any significance to them.

"How could he be in Heaven?" he asked mildly enough.

"Ah, what are you saying?" she asked, half in amusement, half in alarm. "Is it an innocent child?"

"Aren't you forgetting original sin?" Mick asked.

"Ah, for all the sin my poor child had on him!" she wailed. "Where else would he be but in Heaven, the little angel?"

"There's only one place he could be," said Mick. "Limbo."

"Limbo! What would he be doing in Limbo?"

"That's the teaching of the Church."

"Whoever teaches it, they're wrong," she said.

"What you mean is that you believe whatever suits you," Mick said sharply.

His father gave a loud sniff and went out to the garden.

"Will you listen to him?" Mrs. Dowling moaned to the blessed angels. "I believe what suits me!"

"Well, it's true," Mick said, forgetting his intention of being gentle with her. "You believe things no one asks you to believe, and don't believe things you're required to believe. What sort of religion is that?"

"Ah," she said, "I was practicing my religion before you were born. And my mother before me."

There was no logic in her. Mick went out to his father who was prying viciously at a bit of garden wall with a chisel. He was still riled. He knew he had upset his mother, and that, instead of going to someone in authority and finding out that he was right, she would only redouble her prayers and penances.

"Will you look at that for masonry?" his father said with a malice which was half triumph.

"Wouldn't you think they'd try to knock some of that superstition out of people?" Mick asked gloomily.

"Did you ever know a woman that wasn't superstitious?" retorted his father.

Mick had a date with Babiche, and the pair of them went up the woods over the river. They sat there, looking at the serpentining brightness behind the tree trunks, and Mick went over the scene with his mother. He was still angry and argumentative, and to his astonishment Babiche became argumentative too. It wasn't like Babiche, who never made an attempt to follow up an idea, but caught up some name or phrase that amused her and repeated it for months in contexts with which it had nothing on earth to do. But she seemed to resent Limbo almost as a personal affront.

"That was a very silly thing to say," she pouted.

"What's silly about it?" Mick asked angrily. "It's dogma."

"That has nothing to do with it. She was his mother after all."

"And what the blazes has that to do with it?" asked Mick. "I was his brother."

"Oh," she said with a shrug, "you don't care."

"I don't care about what?"

"You don't care about the unfortunate kid. If you had another brother you could say was in Hell you'd be made for life. You don't care for him any more than you care for me."

"I don't care for you?" he repeated, his face darkening.

"Well, isn't it true? I'm only in your way. You want to put on a Roman collar and go hunting down unfortunate old women to know do they believe in Limbo. I'm not going to stand in your way."

Mick was flabbergasted. He realized as she spoke that though he had had no such conscious desire, in fantasy he had been bringing light to a darkened world, and been slightly envious of those who, being able to get on without Babiches, could do it in reality. And his heart was touched at the idea that she had been aware of it, and hurt and lonely.

"I don't want to put on a Roman collar at all," he said flatly.

"Then what do you want?"

"What I've always wanted: get a job and marry you."

She shrugged her shoulders again and did something in a hurry with her shoe.

"Well, there's nothing very difficult about that," she grumbled, and at the same moment a grin came over her face. "But if I have a kid like that and you start telling me he's in Limbo, you won't find me as easygoing as your mother."

Mick set out to make up to her for the past misunderstandings, and Babiche let herself be persuaded. She was not a profound thinker. After that he went home in blind panic. The wild beast was in danger of breaking out again. It was horrible. You swung from instinct to judgment and from judgment back to instinct, and it never got any better and nothing seemed able to arrest the pendulum.

But next morning when he woke the sun was shining through the attic window, and he lay watching it, feeling that something very peculiar had happened to him. He didn't know what it was, but it was something very pleasant. It took him five minutes to realize what it was. The pendulum had stopped. He had lost faith. It was all like a dream, the previous months of exaltation and anxiety, and yet he wasn't in the least unhappy. He wasn't even afraid of the wild beast in himself. He knew the wild beast would never break loose because he was far too fond of human beings to let it.

The following Sunday he went out to Mass as usual with his father, and when they reached the church door he stopped.

"I'll see you after, Dad," he said.

His father showed no sign of surprise, but there was a pause before he said on an even tone:

"I think we might go down the Marina Walk for a change, don't you?"

Mick was heartsick at his father's disappointment and the noble way in which he tried to keep his word.

"You know the way I feel," he said miserably.

"What?" his father asked sharply. "Oh, yes. We all go through it. You have plenty of time. . . . Tell me," he went on inquisitively, "who's that little black-haired girl you're knocking round with?"

"Babiche Regan," said Mick, surprised that his father knew he was knocking round with anyone at all.

"Is she one of the Regans of Ballintemple?"

"That's right," said Mick, mystified by the turn the conversation had taken.

"I knew her father in the County Council," said his father approvingly. "A good family. Is she a fancy or a regular?" he added, as though he didn't know that Mick with his monumental gravity would have let a fancy die on his hands.

"I'm hoping to marry her when I can get a job, if you call that a fancy," growled Mick.

"You might do worse," said his father. "Ah, well, by the time you're settled down you'll be able to make up your mind. . . . Don't be late for that walk," he added warningly, and went in.

Mick strode up the Mardyke by himself, a free man for the first time but slightly anxious. It had sounded almost as though his father had expected Babiche to turn out like his mother, and Mick like himself. At the same time, he could scarcely mean that he expected Babiche to be so irrational or himself so weak.

Of course, it couldn't be; yet there was quiet triumph about his father's surrender that made Mick uneasy, as though it weren't all over yet.

Home by Dark

by JAMES PURDY

Every day his grandfather bought him a new toy of a cheap kind, and a little racing car made out of chocolate. The boy ate the racing car slowly and almost dutifully as he and his grandfather sat on the immense porch and talked about how the birds know when to leave for the South.

"Have we ever been South?" the boy asked his grandfather, after he had finished the chocolate racing car and wiped his hands carefully on his cowboy handkerchief.

"No," the old man said. "Not since your parents died."

"Why don't we go?" the young boy said.

"There would be no reason to," the old man replied.

The birds that had been twittering on the huge lawn that surrounded the great white house in which he lived with his grandfather suddenly rose together in a flock as if hearing an inaudible signal, and disappeared into a clump of trees far off.

"There they all go," the boy told his grandfather.

"There they go," the old man repeated.

"Are you glad they're gone?" the young boy wondered.

"They're not really gone. Not South," the old man told the boy. "It isn't time yet—it's only July."

"Oh, I knowed they hadn't gone South," the boy told his grandfather. "I saw them yesterday do it. They practice like this all day long. They twitter and twitter and twitter, then they all get silent and then *zoom,* they all fly off like they knowed it was time."

"Knew," the grandfather corrected.

"Yes, *knew,*" the boy nodded, and put his hand gently on his grandfather's hand.

"Birds are really strange creatures," the old man admitted. "They remember always where to go, where to build their nests, where to return to. . . ." He shook his head.

"They know to go South when it's cold," the boy agreed. "Except the sparrows. They stay all winter, poor little fellows. They are tough. They don't have no more feathers than the other birds, yet they stay right on, don't they?"

The grandfather nodded.

"Maybe, though, they *do* have more feathers and we can't see them," the boy added, thinking.

"That could be," the old man told his grandson, and he brought his cane up now painfully, and then pressed down with it with his hand.

The boy waited a little for his grandfather to say something more, and the old man, sensing the boy's need for words, said: "Did you like your chocolate racing car?"

"It was sweet and bitter and sweet all at the same time, and then at the very end it was soapy."

"Soapy?" the grandfather wondered.

The boy nodded.

"Well, then there was something wrong with it," the old man complained faintly.

"No," the boy said airily, "That's the way the sweet and the bitter get after you have them both together. See," he said pulling on his grandfather's cane a little, "after you taste the sweet you taste the bitter and after you taste the sweet again you taste the sweet and the bitter, and it's only soapy for a second!"

"I see," the grandfather nodded.

"And then it's all sweet!" the boy laughed, and he jumped up and down on the porch steps, making strange little sounds imitating nobody knew what.

"And I lost a tooth!" the boy told his grandfather.

"Cook told me," the old man informed him.

"Tonight when I go to bed, I am going to put it under my pillow and when I wake up in the morning do you know what is going to be under where I slept all night?"

The grandfather smiled and shook his head.

"A pot of gold," the boy told him.

"What will you do with it?" the grandfather asked.

"I might turn into a bird and go South then," the boy told him.

"But you wouldn't want to leave your old granddad and Cook," the grandfather chided.

The boy thought a moment and said, "I would fly back for supper."

"Well, it will be interesting to see your pot of gold tomorrow," the old man agreed.

"You really think I will get it then?" the boy asked.

"All wishes like that come true," the grandfather said somewhat gravely. "It's because they're a . . . a *pure* wish."

"A *pure* wish?" the boy wondered, scratching his nose. "What's that?"

"Well, like pure candy, you've had that, you know."

The boy shook his head.

"Your chocolate racing car is pure candy," the grandfather said, unsure this was so, and no conviction in his voice.

"Oh," the boy answered.

"All you really wished for, you see," the grandfather explained, "was to have your wish come true. You really hadn't thought what you would do with your wish and your pot of gold."

"Yes," the boy agreed, but his attention wandered.

"So tonight when you go to sleep you must just think that you want the pot of gold, and that is all you want. And don't wish for it too hard, you know."

"No?" the boy raised his voice.

"Not too hard. That would frighten the good fairy away."

"The good fairy?" the boy wondered.

"Yes. Who did you think brought your pot of gold?"

"I thought," the boy felt his way. "I thought . . . somebody dead."

"What?" the old man said, and he moved his cane again so that now it pointed down to the grass where the birds had gathered in a flock.

"Cook didn't really tell me who did bring it," the boy said, studying the confusion on his grandfather's face.

"Yes," the old man said absently, and then looking at his grandson he said, "well, it's really the good fairy, I expect. Don't you know about her?"

The boy shook his head.

"Well, she is the one who's supposed to bring the gold." And the old man laughed rather loudly.

"Do you believe in her?" the boy asked.

"The good fairy?" the old man said, and he began to laugh again, but stopped. "Yes, I do," he said after a pause and with a sleepy serious expression.

The grandfather fished his heavy gold watch out of his vest pocket and looked at its face.

"Seven PM," he said.

"Seven PM," the boy repeated. "One hour to bedtime."

"That's right," the grandfather said, and he put his hand on the boy's head.

"Why don't you want to go South?" the young boy wondered, suddenly.

"Well," the old man stirred in his chair. "Memories, I suppose, you know." But then looking at his grandson he knew the boy did *not* know, and he said, "It's a long story."

"You don't remember why?" the boy asked.

"When you're older I will talk about it," the old man began. "You see there's so much explanation to it, and well, I'm very old, and it tires me out when I make long explanations."

"What is *explanation*—just telling everything, then?"

"Yes," the old man smiled. "And if I told you why I don't want to go South why we'd be here for days!"

"But we are anyhow!" the boy exclaimed. "We're always just standing and sitting and standing and talking here or watching the birds."

The old man was silent.

"Ain't we?" the boy said.

"Well, if I was a bird I would *never* go South," the old man spoke almost as if to himself.

The boy waited and then when his grandfather said no more he told him: "I would always come home at dark, I think, if I was a bird."

"Yes, sir, *tomorrow,*" the old man's voice sounded, taking on warmth, "you'll have your pot of gold!"

"Hurray!" the small boy shouted, and he ran around the old man's chair making sounds now that were those of a jet.

"What will you buy me tomorrow?" the boy asked his grandfather.

"But tomorrow you will have your own pot of gold!" the grandfather told his grandson. "You'll be rich!"

"Will I then?" the boy wondered.

"Don't you believe you'll have it?" the old man interrogated.

"No," the boy said softly.

"But you must believe," the grandfather warned him.

"Why?" the boy asked, looking closely into his grandfather's face.

"You must always believe in one thing, that one thing."

"What is *that one thing*?" the boy asked, an almost scared look on his face.

"Oh, it's hard to say," the old man admitted failure again.

"Not like going South now, don't tell me again," the boy complained.

"No, this is even harder to explain than going South, but I will try to tell you."

The old man drew his grandson closer to him and arranged the collar of the boy's shirt. He said: "There is always one thing a person believes and wants to believe even if he doesn't believe it."

"Ahem," the boy said, standing on only one leg.

"Do you see?" the old man asked, his face soft and smiling.

"Yes," the boy replied, his voice hard.

"All right, then," the old man went on. "There is this one thing you want and you want it more than anything in the world. You see?"

"Like the birds knowing where to fly, you mean?" the boy was cautious.

"Yes," the old man doubted this, and then said, "but more like your pot of gold."

"Oh," the boy replied.

"You want this one thing, and you have to go on believing in it, no matter what."

"Well, what is the thing?" the boy smiled broadly now, showing the place in his mouth where he had lost his tooth, which was a front one.

"Only the person who knows can tell!" the grandfather said loudly as though this were a joke now.

"But am I old enough to know?" the boy said, puzzled and surprised.

"You're old enough and you should tell me now," the grandfather encouraged him.

"So," the boy paused, screwing his eyes shut, and he stood first on one foot and then on another. "I would like my father and mother both to be alive again, and all of us, including you, living South."

The old man opened his mouth and closed it again.

"Isn't that the right answer?" the boy said, worried.

"Yes, of course," the old man hurriedly agreed.

"You don't act like it was the right answer," the boy complained.

"Well, it is, anyhow. The only thing was—I was thinking about wishes that are about the future, you see."

"Oh," the boy was disappointed. Then in a kind of querulous voice he said, "My wish wasn't the future?"

"It's so hard to explain," the grandfather laughed, and he roughed up the boy's hair.

"Well," the boy said, "let's talk about things we can tell each other."

The grandfather laughed.

The light was beginning to die slowly in the trees, and a full rounded moon began to show in the near distance.

Suddenly the boy said *Oh* in a scared voice.

"What is it?" the grandfather was concerned.

"I think I lost my tooth," the boy said.

"You did?" the grandfather was even more alarmed now than the boy.

"I did, I lost it." He felt suddenly in his pockets.

"When we were talking about the birds, you know, I throwed my hand out . . . and the tooth must have been in my hand."

"You *threw* your hand out. Well, then it's in the grass," the grandfather said.

"Yes," the boy agreed.

The old man got out of his chair and his grandson helped him silently down the twelve steps that led to the long walk about which extended the immense lawn where the tooth had been thrown.

They searched patiently in the long grass, which had needed cutting for some time.

"It was such a little tooth," the boy said, as though he realized this fact for the first time.

The old man could not bend over very far, but his eyes, which were still keen, looked sharply about him for the tooth.

"Oh, what shall I ever do!" the boy said suddenly.

"But it will turn up!" the old man cried, but there was the same note of disappointment and fear in his voice, which, communicating itself to the boy, caused the latter to weep.

"You mustn't cry," the grandfather was stern. "It won't do at all!"

"But the pot of gold and all!" the boy cried.

"It doesn't matter at all," the grandfather said, and he touched the boy on the face.

"But you told me it did," the boy wept now.

"I told you *what*?" the old man said.

"You told me there was just that one thing you should want to believe in."

"But you've only lost your tooth," the old man replied. "And we'll find it. It isn't lost forever. The gardener will find it when he comes."

"Oh, I'm afraid not," the boy said, wandering about now picking up the grass by the handfuls, looking and watching about him in the fading light.

"If we only hadn't let Cook take the flashlight we might locate it with that," the grandfather said, a few minutes later, when the light was quite gone.

The boy now just stood in one place staring down at the grass.

"I think we'll have to give up the search for tonight," the grandfather finally said.

"But this is the only night I can have my wish!" the boy cried "This is the ONLY night."

"Nonsense," the grandfather told him. "Not true at all."

"But it is, it is," the boy contradicted his grandfather, gravely.

"How do you know?" the grandfather wondered.

"My mother told me," the boy said.

"But you don't . . . you don't remember her!" the grandfather stared into the growing dark.

"She told me in my sleep," the boy said, his voice plain, unemphatic.

The grandfather looked at his grandson's face but the dark hid it and its expression from him.

"Let's go up the steps now," the grandfather told him.

The small boy helped the old man up the twelve steps, and at the last one the old man laughed, making fun of his fatigue.

The grandfather sat down heavily in the chair, his cane thrown out as though commanding something, or somebody.

"We'll find your tooth tomorrow, or we'll all be hanged," the grandfather said cheerily. "And we won't let Cook take our flashlight again, will we?"

The boy did not answer. He stood as he stood every night beside his grandfather, looking out over the western sky, tonight half-seeing the red harvest moon rise.

"I will buy you something different tomorrow," the grandfather said, "so that it will be a real surprise. Do you hear?"

The boy said yes.

"You're not crying now," the grandfather said. "That's good."

The boy nodded.

"I'm glad you're brave too, because a boy should not cry, really, no matter even. . . . Well, he should never cry."

"But I don't know what to believe in now," the boy said in a dry old voice.

"Fiddlesticks," the old man said. "Now come over here and sit on my lap and I will talk to you some more."

The boy moved slowly and sat down on his grandfather's lap.

"Ouch," the grandfather said playfully when he felt how heavy the boy was.

"Just the two of us," the old man said. "Just the two of us here, but we're good friends, aren't we. Good good old friends."

He pushed the boy's head tight against his breast so he would not hear the sounds that came out now like a confused and trackless torrent, making ridiculous the quiet of evening, and he closed his own eyes so that he would not see the moon.

The Dummy

by SUSAN SONTAG

Since my situation is intolerable, I have decided to take steps to resolve it. So I have constructed a perfectly lifelike dummy, made of various brands of Japanese plastic simulating flesh, hair, nails and so forth. An electronics engineer of my acquaintance, for a sizeable fee, set up the interior mechanism of the dummy: it will be able to talk, eat, work, walk and copulate. I hired an important artist of the old realistic school to paint the features; after twelve sittings the job was done to my entire satisfaction. Needless to say, this dummy perfectly resembles me. My broad nose is there, my brown hair, the lines on each side of my mouth. Even I could not tell the dummy and myself apart, were it not for the fact that from my peculiar vantage point it is quite obvious that he is he and that I am I.

All that remains is to install the dummy in the center of my life. He will go to work instead of me, and receive the approval and censure of my boss. He will bow and scrape and be diligent. All I require of him is that he bring me the check every other Wednesday; I will give him carfare and money for his lunches, but no more. I'll make out the checks for the rent and the utilities, and pocket the rest myself. The dummy will also be the one who is married to my wife. He will make love to her on Tuesday and Saturday night, watch the television with her every evening, eat her competent dinners, quarrel with her about how to bring up the children. (My wife, who also works, pays the grocery bills out of her salary.) I will also assign the dummy Monday night bowling with the team from the office, the visit to my mother on Friday night, reading the newspaper each morning, and perhaps buying my clothes (two sets—one for him, one for me). Other tasks I will assign as they come up, as I wish to divest myself of them. I want to keep for myself only what gives me pleasure.

A grandiose plan, you say? But why not? The problems of this world are only truly solved in two ways: by extinction, or by duplication. Former ages, less advanced than ours, had only the first choice. But I see no reason not to take advantage of the marvels of modern science and technology for the liberation of man. I have a choice. And, not being the suicidal type, I have decided to duplicate myself.

On a fine Monday morning I wind the dummy up and set him loose, after making sure he knows just what to do—that is, he knows just how I would behave in any familiar situation. (The unprecedented situations I leave him to decide for himself.) The alarm goes off. He rolls over, pokes my wife, who wearily gets out of the double bed and turns the alarm off. She puts on her slippers and robe, then limps, stiff-ankled, into the bathroom. The dummy lies in bed a few more minutes. When she comes out and heads for the kitchen, he gets up and takes her place in the bathroom. He urinates, washes out his mouth, shaves, comes back into the bedroom and takes his clothes out of the dresser and closet, returns to the bathroom, dresses, then joins my wife in the kitchen. My children are already at the table. The younger girl didn't finish her homework last night, and my wife is writing a note of excuse to the teacher. The older girl sits haughtily, munching the cold toast. "Morning, Daddy," they say to the dummy. The dummy pecks them each on the cheek in return. Breakfast passes without incident, I observe with relief. The children leave. They haven't noticed a thing. I begin to feel sure my plan is going to work. Only now do I notice, by my excitement, that I had greatly feared it would not—that there would be some mechanical failure on the dummy's part, so that he would not recognize his cues. But no, everything is going right, even the way he folds *The New York Times* is correct; he reproduces exactly the amount of time I spend on the foreign news, and it takes him just as long to read the sports pages as it took me.

The dummy kisses my wife, he steps out the door, he enters the elevator. (Do machines recognize each other, I wonder?) Into the lobby, out the door, on the street walking at a moderate pace—the dummy has left on time, he doesn't have to worry—into the subway he goes. Steady, calm, clean (I cleaned him myself Sunday night), untroubled, he goes about his appointed tasks. He will be happy as long as I am satisfied with him. And so I will be, whatever he does, as long as others are satisfied with him. Meanwhile, I have myself to myself.

Nobody notices anything different in the office, either. The secretary says hello, he smiles back as I always do; then he walks to my cubicle, hangs up his coat and sits at my desk. The secretary brings him my mail. After reading it, he calls for some dictation. Next, there is a pile of papers—my unfinished business left from last Friday—to attend to. Phone calls are made, an appointment is set up for lunch with a client from out of town. There is only one irregularity that I notice: the dummy smokes seven cigarettes during the morning; I usually smoke between ten and fifteen. But I set this down to the fact that he is new at his work, and has not had time to accumulate the tensions which I feel after working six years in this office. It occurs to me that he will probably not have two martinis—as I always do—during the lunch, but only one; and I am right. But these are mere details, and will be to the dummy's credit if anyone notices them, which I even doubt. His behavior with the out-of-town client is quite correct, perhaps a shade too eager and deferential, but this too I put down to inexperience. Thank God, no simple matter tripped him up. His table manners were as they should be. He didn't pick at his food, but ate with appetite. And he knew he should sign the check, rather than pay with cash; for the firm has an account at the restaurant which he chose.

In the afternoon there is a sales conference. The vice-president is explaining a new promotional campaign for the Midwest. The dummy makes a couple of suggestions. The boss nods. The dummy taps his pencil on the top of the long mahogany table and looks thoughtful. I notice he is chain-smoking. Could he be feeling the pressure so soon? I feel a moment's solicitude for him. What a hard life I led! After less than a day of it, even a dummy shows some wear and tear. The rest of the afternoon passes without incident. The dummy makes his way home to my wife and children, eats his dinner appreciatively, plays Monopoly with the children for an hour, watches a Western on TV with my wife, bathes, makes himself a ham sandwich in the kitchen, and then retires to bed. I don't know what dreams he dreamt, but I hope they were restful and pleasant. If my approval could give him an untroubled sleep, he had it. I am entirely pleased with my creation.

The dummy has been on the job for several months now. What can I report? A greater degree of proficiency? But that's impossible. He was fine the first day. He couldn't be any more like me than he was at the very beginning. So he does not have to get better at his job, but only stick at it contentedly, unrebelliously, without mechanical failure. My wife is happy with him, at least no more unhappy than she was with me. My children call him Daddy and ask him for their allowance. My fellow-workers and my boss continue to entrust him with my old job at the office.

Lately, though—just the past week, really—I have noticed something that worries me. Only slightly. It is the attention that the dummy is paying to the new secretary, Miss Love. I hope it isn't her name that arouses him, somewhere in the depths of that complicated machinery; I imagine machines can be awfully literal-minded. Anyway, it isn't anything serious. Just a slight lingering at her desk when he comes in in the morning, a second's pause, no more, when she says hello; whereas I—and he until recently—used to walk by that desk without breaking my stride. And he does seem to be dictating more letters lately. Could it be an increased zeal on behalf of the firm? I remember how, the very first day, he spoke up at the sales conference. Or could it be the desire to detain Miss Love a few minutes more? Are all those letters really necessary? I could swear he thinks so. But then you never know what goes on behind that imperturbable dummy's face of his. I'm frankly afraid to ask him. Is it because I don't want to know the worst? Or because I'm afraid he'll be angry at my violation of his privacy? In any case, I have decided to wait until he tells me.

Then one day it comes. The news I had dreaded. At eight in the morning the dummy corners me in the shower, where I had been spying on him while he was shaving—really just marveling how he remembered to cut himself every once in a while, as I do. He unburdens himself to me, confesses all. I am astonished at how much he is moved. Astonished, and a little envious. I never dreamed a dummy could have so much feeling, that I would see a dummy weep. I try to quiet him, I admonish him, then I reprimand him. It's no use. His tears become sobs. He, or rather his passion, whose mechanism I cannot fathom, begins to revolt me. I'm also terrified my wife and children will hear him, rush to the bathroom, and there find this berserk creature who would be incapable of normal responses. (Might they find both of us here in the bathroom? That, too, is possible.) I run the shower, open both the sink faucets, and flush the toilet to drown out the painful noises he is making. All this for love! All this for the love of Miss Love! He has barely spoken to her, except in the way of business. Certainly, he hasn't slept with her, of that I am sure. And yet he is madly, desperately in love. He wants to leave my wife. I explain to him how impossible that is. First of all, he has certain duties and responsibilities. He is the husband and father to my wife and children. They depend on him; their lives would be smashed by his selfish act. And second, what does he know about Miss Love? She's at least ten years younger than he is, had given no particular sign of noticing him at all, and probably has a nice boyfriend her own age whom she's planning to marry.

The dummy refuses to listen. He is inconsolable. He will have Miss Love or—here he makes a threatening gesture—he will destroy himself. He will bang his head against the wall, or jump out of a window, disassembling irrevocably his delicate machinery. Now I become really alarmed. I see my whole marvelous scheme, which has left me so beautifully at my leisure and in peace the last months, ruined. I see myself back at the job, making love again to my wife, fighting for space in the subway during the rush hour, watching television, spanking the children. If this was intolerable to me before, you can imagine how unthinkable it is now. Why, if only you knew how I had spent these last months, while the dummy was administering my life. Without a care in the world, except for an occasional spurt of curiosity as to the fate of my dummy, I had slid to the bottom of the world. I slept anywhere now; in flophouses, on the subway (which I only boarded very late at night), in alleys and doorways. I didn't bother to collect my paycheck from the dummy any more, because there was nothing I wanted to buy. Only rarely did I shave myself. My clothes were torn and stained.

Does this sound very dreary to you? It was not, it was not. Of course, when the dummy first relieved me of my own life, I had grandiose plans for living the lives of others. I wanted to be an Arctic explorer, a concert pianist, a great courtesan, a world statesman. I tried being Alexander the Great, then Mozart, then Bismarck, then Greta Garbo, then Elvis Presley—in my imagination, of course. I imagined that, being none of these people very long, I could have only the pleasure of their lives, none of the pain; for I could escape, transform myself, whenever I wanted. But the experiment failed, for lack of interest, from exhaustion, call it what you will. I discovered that I am tired of being a person. Not just tired of being the person I was, but any person at all. I like watching persons, but I don't like talking to them, dealing with them, pleasing them or offending them. I don't even like talking to the dummy. I am tired. I would like to be a mountain, a tree, a stone. If I am to continue as a person, the life of the solitary derelict is the only one tolerable to me. So you will see that it was quite out of the question that I should allow the dummy to destroy himself, and have to take his place and live again my old life.

I continue my efforts of persuasion. I get him to dry his tears and go out and face the family breakfast, promising him that we will continue the conversation in the office, after he dictates his morning batch of letters to Miss Love. He agrees to make the effort, and makes his red-eyed, somewhat belated appearance at the table. "A cold, dear?" says my wife solicitously. The dummy blushes and mumbles something. I pray that he will hurry up. I am afraid he will break down again. I notice with alarm that he can hardly eat, and leaves his coffee cup two-thirds full.

The dummy makes his way sadly out of the apartment, leaving my wife somewhat perplexed and apprehensive. I see him hail a cab instead of heading for the subway; matters are really critical. In the office, I eavesdrop as he dictates his letters, sighing between every sentence. Miss Love notices, too. "Why, what's the matter," she says cheerfully. There is a long pause. I peep out of the closet, and what do I see! The dummy and Miss Love in a hot embrace. He is stroking her breasts, her eyes are closed, with their mouths they wound each other. The dummy catches sight of me, staring from behind the closet door. I signal wildly, trying to make him understand that we must talk, that I'm on his side, that I'll help him. "Tonight?" whispers the dummy, slowly releasing the ecstatic Miss Love. "I adore you," she whispers. "I adore you," says the dummy in a voice above a whisper, "and I must see you." "Tonight," she whispers back. "My place. Here's the address."

One more kiss and Miss Love goes out. I emerge from the closet and lock the door of the little office. "Well," says the dummy. "It's Love or death." "All right," I say sadly, "I won't try to talk you out of it any more. She seems like a nice girl anyway. And quite attractive. Who knows, if she had been working here when I was here. . . ." I see the dummy frowning angrily, and don't finish the sentence. "But you'll have to give me a little time," I say. "What are you going to do? As far as I can see, there's nothing you can do," says the dummy. "If you think I'm going home to your wife and kids any more, after I've found Love!" I plead with him for time.

What do I have in mind? Simply this. The dummy after all is now in my original position. His present arrangements for life are intolerable to him. But having more appetite for a real, single life than I ever had, he doesn't want to vanish completely from the world. He just wants to replace my admittedly second-hand wife and two noisy daughters with the delightful, childless Miss Love. Well then, why shouldn't my solution—duplication—work for him as it did for me? Anything is better than suicide. The time I needed of him was to make another dummy, one to stay with my wife and children and go to my job while this dummy (the true dummy, I must now call him) eloped with Miss Love.

We agree to conclude our conference a little later that day. I borrow some money from him to go to a Turkish bath and get cleaned up, to get a haircut and shave at the barber's, and to buy myself a suit like the one he is wearing. On his suggestion, we are to meet for lunch at a small restaurant in Greenwich Village, where it is impossible that he should meet anyone who might recognize him. I'm not sure what he is afraid of. Of having lunch alone, and being seen talking to himself? Of being seen with me? But I am perfectly presentable now. And if we are seen as two, what could be more normal than a pair of identical adult male twins, dressed alike, having lunch together, and engaged in earnest conversation? The lunch takes place. We both order spaghetti *al burro* and baked clams. After three drinks, he comes round to my point of view. In consideration of my wife's feelings, he says—not mine, he insists several times in a rather harsh tone of voice—he will wait. But only a few months, no more. I point out that in this interim I will not ask that he not sleep with Miss Love, but only that he be discreet in his adultery.

Making the second dummy was a little harder than making the first. My entire savings were wiped out. Prices of humanoid plastic and the other materials, the fees of the engineer and the artist, had all gone up within just a year's time. The dummy's salary, I might add, hadn't gone up at all, despite the evidence of the boss's increased appreciation of the dummy's value to the firm. The dummy is annoyed that I insist that he, rather than I, sit for the artist when the facial features are being molded and painted. But I point out to him that if the second dummy is drawn from me again, there is a chance it would be a somewhat faded or blurred copy. Undoubtedly, there are some disparities between the appearance of the first dummy and my own, even though I cannot detect them. I want the second dummy to be like him, wherever there is the slightest difference between him and me. I shall just have to take the risk that the second dummy might also reproduce the unforeseen human passion that robbed the first dummy of his value to me.

Finally, the second dummy is ready. Also on my insistence, and very reluctantly since he wanted to have all his spare time to spend with Miss Love, the first dummy takes charge of his training and indoctrination period, lasting several weeks. Then the great day arrives. The second dummy is installed in the first dummy's life in the midst of a Saturday afternoon baseball game, during the seventh inning stretch. It had been arranged that the first dummy will go out to buy hot dogs and cokes for my wife and children. It is the first dummy who goes out, the second who returns laden with the food and drinks.

The first dummy then leaps into a cab, and races off to the waiting arms of Miss Love.

That was nine years ago. The second dummy is living with my wife in no more exalted or more depressed a fashion than I had managed with her. The oldest girl is in college, the second in high school; and there is a new child, a boy, now six years old. They have moved to a new co-op apartment in Forest Hills; my wife has quit her job; and the second dummy is assistant vice-president of the firm. The first dummy went back to college nights while working as a waiter during the day; Miss Love also went back to college and got her teacher's license. He is now an architect with a growing practice; she teaches English at Julia Richmond High School. They have two children, a boy and a girl, and are remarkably happy. From time to time, I visit both my dummies. Never without sprucing myself up first, you understand. I consider myself a relative, and the godfather, sometimes the uncle, of all their children. I notice neither are ever too happy to see me, perhaps because of my shabby appearance, but they haven't the courage to turn me out. I never stay long, but I wish them well, and congratulate myself for having solved the problems of this one poor short life that is allotted me in so equitable and responsible a manner.

The Night the Bird Blew for Dr. Warner

by TERRY SOUTHERN

"I'll have to be a hipster," Doctor Warner said leaning toward them from out of billowing dark leather while behind this great chair, where study lamplight softened to haze on a thousand grains of dullest panel, there danced in points of twos the refracted amber of glassed cubed-ice in the hands of his two friends opposite—danced, it seemed, on an opaque screen which could measure the wildness of thought and the tedium of conversation.

"A very *hip* hipster," he continued genially, and withdrew himself slightly, for emphasis, "if not, indeed, something *more*."

Dr. Ralph Warner was fifty-five, gray and distinguished, a man of remarkable vigor and personality. He was not a physician, but a learned man of music, who had received many public and institutional honors. An established author and critic, past conductor of the San Francisco, Boston and Denver symphony orchestras, he had become, because of his popular, progressive innovations in policy and repertoire, one of the most beloved and respected men in the musical history of the country.

"Something *more*?" said Professor Thomas, stressing his mock surprise with a sickly smile. He loathed strange jargon. "Don't tell me there's anything *more*, Ralph, than being a hipster!"

"That's right," said the younger George Drew eagerly, "how could anything be more *hip* than a hipster?" He *loved* it. "*En tout cas,* not semantically." He seemed to repress a spasm of delight, as though the prospect of spritely argument could give him goose-pimples.

Dr. Warner allowed his own gaze to grow sober and formulative, staring down at the drink in his hand.

"Yes," he said evenly, "you might say that a *junky* is something more than a hipster."

Professor Thomas snorted politely. "Good Lord, from where on earth did they dig up that term?"

"From its not too earthy grave in Hong Kong harbor, I dare say," said George Drew coolly, finishing off his drink with a little effeminate toss of his head.

"Drugs again, I'm afraid, Tom," put in Dr. Warner, often their genial moderator. "Opiates. Heroin this time."

At home with every idiom, Dr. Warner gave himself as wholly to Alban Berg as he did to Tschaikovsky, as devotedly to Tanglewood as to the Juilliard String Quartet; and already, at fifty-five, he had been frequently called a "grand old man of music," and again, in other contexts, perhaps because his scope naturally tended at some points toward erudition, a "musician's musician."

Now more and more of his time was given over to writing. His work to date consisted of well-received one-volume studies of Brahms, Mozart and Schubert; hundred-page sections on Bach, Beethoven and Wagner; chapters on almost everyone from Palestrina to Schönberg; and a definitive little brochure on Bartók. Dr. Warner's writing bristled with information and tight parallels, in a style pleasantly fluid, sprinkled with humor, penetrating insights and anecdotes which lacked neither warmth nor sophistication.

Before the war, and since, he had toured Europe regularly and had guest-conducted every major orchestra from Blackpool to Copenhagen. He was mentioned with frequency and respect in the gossip sections of the weekly news-periodicals.

But now he had gone into hiding, or so it must have seemed to his biographers, though they knew in truth that he was away, working on his book. It was by no means his most ambitious. Musicologists, critics, teachers in the colleges and academies, art-appreciation groups, cultured people everywhere looked forward to its release—a book which was to treat the whole of Western Music, its origin and development to the present day, again touted by the publishers as being definitive. And while this claim was absurd, that the book would have certain value there were no doubts, because Dr. Warner, beside bringing to bear "the breadth of a versatile genius welded to almost unprecedented vitality and an all-embracing devotion to music," was known, in this world of music at least, to be relatively *fair*, or impartial.

"Heroin," said George Drew, pouring himself another. "Treacherous, treacherous."

"Amazing prevalence among them," joined Professor Thomas, unimpressed. "*Simply* amazing."

"Prevalent, Tom? Or standard?" asked Dr. Warner with a show of seriousness. "I'm really beginning to wonder."

"God knows!" wailed the Professor unexpectedly, raising his hands. "The whole thing is beyond me. In the first place, how you propose to—to get *next* to those people is more than I can see." There was heat and resentment in his voice, and it was only after a moment's pause that he could reassert a detached and amiable interest in the subject. "For my money, I think I'd stick, primarily at least, to the material already compiled. Lord, there must be a wealth of it." He exaggerated in a gesture the stack and assortment of books on the study table: popular histories of jazz, exposés and testimonials, confessional stories of reformed drug addicts, whores and criminals—all of which had been somehow tied to the words "jazz" and "be-bop."

"Surface, Tom," said Ralph Warner. "Purely surface material. It's never been . . . really *lived* by anyone qualified to do it up."

"Ralph," began George Drew, "do you actually suppose you can, as Tom says, get next to them?"

"I think I can, George," said Ralph Warner. "I-think-I-can. After all, it's simply another viewpoint. A matter of language really. Vernacular."

"Do you know," said George Drew warming now toward the heart of it, "that you're *very* liable to be approached on this drug business yourself? I mean, they might ask *you* to take some. What do you do then, Ralph?"

Dr. Warner smiled a little, shyly it seemed. "Then? Why, then I suppose there would be only one thing *to* do—gracefully." And so saying, he leaned back in his great chair and slowly raised both hands. "The unhappy part of the business is," he went on, beaming helplessly, "I have an absolute horror of *needles*."

Before completing the book's section, "Dixieland and the Blues," Dr. Warner had meticulously sifted through all the written material on the subject, and had listened to some seven hundred graded recordings, many of them several times, taking copious notes the while. Then he had flown down to New Orleans for an intensive week of first-hand research. When he was not actually listening to music, he ferreted about the Quarter, poking into any narrow opening of whatever half-promise, prowling the blue haze of midnight alleys, tapping carefully on every soundless, dawn-lit cellar door, as though each were his own oak podium.

He spoke to hundreds of people: strangers, drunks, unknown—and, most often, worthless—musicians, bystanders, children, blind men who touched their canes to the earth in some possible connection with the music. And if, in the bandstand's shadow of an afternoon session, a dog lay stretched in refuge from the heat of day, the Doctor might give it a pat on the head in passing. Then, at night, in the *boîtes* of the Quarter, instead of taking a table, he stood with his drink where the brass and the smoke were the bluest, at the left front corner of the bandstand, stood with one foot on the raised platform, tie loosened, an easy smile on his face which worked beneath half closed eyes on the blue, blue offbeat, while his free hand, at rest on his raised knee, raced the fingers in subtle and intricate tattoo. At the end of a number, if there was an empty glass on the bandstand, he had it filled. And when the men took a break, he was with them, the ones that hung together around the bar, to pay for the drinks and listen to the slow and easy talk of those who play the blues.

As soon as one place closed, he went to another, sometimes in the company of one or two musicians, and toward morning they ate together. By seven he was back in his room where he wrote steadily for two hours. Then he would go to bed and sleep until three in the afternoon, get up, dress, and eat again before resuming his tour of the Quarter. He did this for seven days, and during this time he was careful about three things: (1) never to request a number, (2) to talk with no more than one musician at a time about music, and (3) in doing so, to expose his own knowledge, not by dissertation, as the canyon openly yawns its vastness, but by remark, as a mountain will suggest fantastic untold depths through one startling crevasse. And he even had the gall and devotion, one time toward early morning in a booth gone blue-gray with the circling tides of smoke, when a sleepy-faced drummer passed him a sweet cigarette the thinness of two matchsticks, to hold it as he might have been expected, take quick deep drags, wink without smiling, and say in a low voice, *"Crazy, man."*

He never identified himself, but he was usually remembered as "an old guy who knew a goddam hell of a lot about music," or again, by such as the drummer, as a "pretty stuffy cat."

"Ralph," said Professor Thomas, "let me get this straight. Do you mean you're going to submit to drug injections?"

His hands clasped under his chin, Dr. Warner smiled, even sheepishly, though as one could see, with a certain secure pride.

"What sort of drugs, Ralph?" George Drew came in, having already chosen a side.

"Heroin, I imagine," said Dr. Warner easily.

Professor Thomas started to speak, but took a sip from his drink instead and pursed his lips.

"This may strike you as a bit old-fashioned," he said then, completely ignoring George Drew, "but isn't there a very real physiological danger in heroin injections—for a man of your age, Ralph?"

Ralph Warner shook his head. "I won't main-line," he said soberly. "Just skin-popping. Anyway, on single dosages, cardiac response is negligible. I've looked into it, of course."

George Drew, who was thirty-five years old, was beginning to resemble his undergraduate photographs at Princeton. He sat forward in the chair, spoke carefully and, as usual, seemed to put an emphasis on every other word. "Ralph, as I get it, 'main-line' is to take the stuff directly into a blood vein; and the other, 'skin-pop,' or 'skin-popping' is a muscle or tissue injection, right? But now, what exactly is the difference?"

"Flash," said Dr. Warner expansively, then paused to smile at Professor Thomas who had audibly scoffed over the question. "You see what I mean by language, eh? Well, the immediacy of effect in main-lining is called the *flash*. Something you don't get in skin-popping, where the effect is relatively gradual."

"Just what *is* the effect?" asked Professor Thomas, as though he were already bored with it.

George Drew shifted in his chair, impatient; and Dr. Warner waved his hands, vaguely protesting. "Oh, I'm sure it's very subjective, of course, Tom. A sort of will-less euphoria, I suppose. Sensations of security and general well-being. Wish-fulfillment. Self-sufficiency, if you like. Followed, I imagine, by depression, or letdown."

From Bach to Be-bop was, by publisher's choice, the title of Dr. Warner's book. And the Doctor sometimes told the story of how he had indulged them in this, only, of course, after stressing its obvious anomaly. For the book's opening plate was a diagram of the ear, and its second a sample of cuneiform writing; moreover, it was not until page fifty-one that there was mention even of Gregorian chant. And yet he would often end the story by admitting their point that, after all, three-quarters of the book was so concerned, with Bach and thereafter.

"What I tell them is this: 'I'll write it. You can name it, eh? And you can sell it!' " A well-received story. A funny story by a famous man, and the way the Doctor would laugh and shake his head gave the impression that he thought publishers like young women, dealings with whom called for, if anything, a slightly amused condescension.

"For one thing," said Professor Thomas at last, "it's against the law. Very much so. Against the law, *and dangerous."*

"Calculated risks, eh Ralph?" said George Drew happily.

"Or, occupational hazards," replied Ralph Warner, glowing with modesty.

"Good Lord!" Professor Thomas finished his drink. "I'll stick to Scotch myself." He poured himself another and stirred in quite a bit of soda. "Drug poisoning. Addiction. An unclean needle and you could die of tetanus during your euphoria."

"Please," said Ralph Warner, half jokingly, "let's not speak of *needles."*

"Well, there you are," said Professor Thomas and took another sip, grimacing.

Shortly before the arrival of his two friends, Dr. Warner had begun the first draft of the book's final section. He had written:

> "Life has always been a struggle.
>
> It is tedious to say again, that, through modern science and technology, our material horizons have been broadened, our physical burdens lessened. A badly worn phrase, and it is yet another to point up these gains as having not seriously affected the

> greater struggle . . . the quest for peace of mind and happiness, the search for security. For it is evident today, perhaps as never before, that we have . . ."

Here, he broke off and put in parentheses just below: "(greed, hate, war, moral and spiritual confusion, etc.)" and then a marginal note to himself, "break with humor—philosophic *doldrums* (?)" and to the list, "greed, hate, war, etc.," he added, "crime," after which he quickly resumed to write, lower on the page:

> "Let it stand as living testimony to the fiber of our times that a musical idiom characterized by dissonance and atonality, by unpatterned time-change, and impassive distortion of popular themes, has gained wide favor . . ."

He took a second sheet and started at about the middle of the page:

> *"Be-bop, bop,* or, more currently, (*modern*) *jazz,* has been defined as 'variations on a theme which is never wholly stated,' but which theme, it should be added, occurs (concomitant to the execution) in the mind of the performing artist (*and* the good listener) and which, if expressed at any point, would, in the technical sense, harmonize with the improvisation . . .
>
> It is significant that the emotional nihilism, or again, the cold, satiric intent which has come to be identified with these interpretations . . ."

He skipped another space, and wrote:

> "Yet, beneath this cynical veneer, as beneath the chimera of strife and bitterness in everyday living, pulses a vital substance . . ."

Momentarily discarding this sheet, he went back to the first page, and where he had written, "Let it stand as living testimony to the fiber of our times," crossed it through, and rewrote, "Let it stand, a living mirror to the fiber of our times," and immediately below, in the margin, "reflection of, etc."

"Who's to say how you'll react?" Professor Thomas took it up again now. "According to all accounts, there's no foretelling the effect of drugs. You'd better be careful, Ralph. Damned careful."

"Ralph," said George Drew in an almost blatant interruption, "as, well, as an amateur semanticist, I'm very much interested in vocabularies and their physical correlations; that is, if and when they do exist. I mean, of course, in terms of the particular group mentality involved—"

"Careful," repeated Professor Thomas half aloud. "You'll have to be very careful." He was quite serious.

"Oh yes, Tom," said Dr. Warner, wearily, but added at once, as on an afterthought, and with a smile for them both, "yes, I'm hip."

Coming up the subway stairs, Dr. Warner touched at his throat with an already damp handkerchief. It was a warm evening.

The Doctor, dressed for the occasion, was wearing a gray flannel suit and a soft dark shirt, buttoned at the collar. The shoes he wore were suede and had heavy crepe soles. Clean shaven and hatless, his fine head erect, glinting silver beneath changing lights, he could have been an owner of horses, or a California surgeon. Or, he could have been a very proper junky, for his movements were listless, as without direction, and his face was in absolute blank repose, betraying nothing, except indifference and, possibly, a dull and distant contempt for effort. But his mind was still not under control. Why had he said he wouldn't main-line it? Of course, he *would have to main-line it*. What had he been thinking of? These weren't children!

At the top of the stairs he paused and brought the handkerchief to his face again. On the street it seemed even warmer. But he knew this would pass. Once he was moving, once he was functioning, it would be all right. He even managed to think: *then it'll be cool*. And he could have smiled at this, but his face wouldn't betray him. He had mastered his face. He had mastered everything but his thoughts, and his thoughts were of the order of those of famous actors in the seconds leading up to the big scene: *blood in the chamber . . . matches and spoon . . . you cut it, I'll cut it, won't cook up, will cook up, behind the knuckle, blood in the chamber, matches and silence, silence. Be cool.*

Leaning against an iron post by the subway entrance, Dr. Warner began to order his thoughts. He lit a cigarette, but the cigarette at once recalled the smoke-filled booth in New Orleans; and what he was about to do suddenly took on another irresistible importance. Marijuana was one thing, heroin was another. Heroin was *stronger.* He distrusted the word, but could think of no better one. Heroin is stronger, he thought. *There's something irretrievable . . . there's no emetic for a substance put straight into the blood stream. There's no turning back. And they say if you fight it . . . .*

At that moment, a cab passed very close to the curb, slowing for the changing light, and the Doctor's eye caught his own distinguished image framed squarely for an instant in the window glass. He dropped the cigarette and slowly ground his foot over it. And he knew he would be able to do whatever was required.

He crossed the street toward an alleyway opposite. At the head of the alleyway was a short-order place, its door and raised glass front open to the summer night, where, because of a small neon MALTED sign, light lay upon light in soft transparent cubes, forming a great milk green swath across the sidewalk and curb, violated by a flashing liquor brand across the way which moved in stabs of red as harsh as traffic noise. But from a jukebox inside came the sound of a singing tenor sax . . . leaping out raid-like through neon against the passing traffic, to flurry just above their heads, brandishing something there in sound so quick and serious before springing back again, it could only astonish them.

Standing around on the sidewalk, or leaning against the front of the short-order place, were three or four young men in different attitudes of listening to the music, or of just standing there. There was nothing in their manner or dress to relate them, and each seemed somehow alone, but all their faces bore the same stamp of extreme ennui and polite detachment that was due to something more than just civilization.

Walking very slowly, Dr. Warner paused when he reached the corner of the alleyway and the short-order place, and after standing for a few minutes listening, he leaned against the wall himself.

The person next to him was a boy of about twenty-five. He was as thin as an El Greco saint, with eyes like two black pins. He did not seem to have noticed the Doctor's arrival. After a few minutes, Dr. Warner spoke to the boy without looking at him, staring straight ahead, his voice soft and without inflection.

"Hey, man," he said, "what's happenin'?"

The boy seemed to blink as he turned his head, giving the Doctor a slow, quizzical look, almost a smile.

"You tell me, daddy," he said finally, his lips scarcely moving, "know what I mean, like you tell me."

"Well, man," said Dr. Warner, "like I just got on the scene, dig, and I was wondering if anything was *happenin'* tonight. I'd like to make it, you know what I mean?"

"I'm afraid I don't," said the boy, as though from some incredible distance.

Dr. Warner gave him a tired, patient smile.

"Now don't jump salty, daddy-o," he said, "I mean like level with me 'cause I'm straight for loot, dig, and I got eyes, you know what I mean, like I got big eyes to get on and just fall out someplace where the cats are blowin'."

The boy turned his face away and was staring straight ahead.

"Like what?" he said at last.

"Well, like *Bird*; you *know*?"

The boy turned again and regarded the Doctor, slowly and vaguely. Then, with considerable effort, he indicated with a movement of his head direction down the alley.

"Man, do you see that light? At the end? Yeah, well there might be something happenin' there."

Dr. Warner nodded with grave knowing. "Crazy," he said and then, with his slow wink of confidence as he departed, "Later, man."

The boy blinked with disinterest and sank carefully back against the wall.

The alley was narrowly lit and lined with a pure blackness from which rose huge dark piles of rubbish.

As Dr. Warner walked, spiritedly now, he reproduced, whistling, almost exactly what he had heard from the juke-box.

Then he began to frame a sentence in his mind's eye: "As to progressional pattern, the atonal *riff* is invariably—" and he had just succeeded in freezing *riff* in italics when the word and the phrase exploded in a flash of blinding white, as an arm swung out from the darkness and laid a short segment of lead pipe across the back of the Doctor's head. As he staggered between two mountains of refuse, he was hit again, and the white light was shot through with coils and bolts of purple and gray, then flooded out on a heavy wave of blood-blackness.

One man took off the Doctor's watch and emptied his billfold, while the second went through his other pockets. They both wore gloves.

The Affair at 7, rue de M—

by JOHN STEINBECK

I had hoped to withhold from public scrutiny those rather curious events which have given me some concern for the past month. I knew of course that there was talk in the neighborhood. I have even heard some of the distortions current in my district, stories, I hasten to add, in which there is no particle of truth. However, my desire for privacy was shattered yesterday by a visit of two members of the fourth estate who assured me that the story, or rather *a* story, had escaped the boundaries of my *arrondissement*.

In the light of impending publicity I think it only fair to issue the true details of those happenings which have come to be known as The Affair at 7, rue de M—, in order that nonsense may not be added to a set of circumstances which are not without their *bizarrerie*. I shall set down the events as they happened without comment, thereby allowing the public to judge of the situation.

At the beginning of the summer I carried my family to Paris and took up residence in a pretty little house at 7, rue de M—, a building which in another period had been the mews of the great house beside it. The whole property is now owned and part of it inhabited by a noble French family of such age and purity that its members still consider the Bourbons unacceptable as claimants to the throne of France.

To this pretty little converted stable with three floors of rooms above a well-paved courtyard, I brought my immediate family, consisting of my wife, my three children, two small boys and a grown daughter, and of course myself. Our domestic arrangement—in addition to the concierge who, as you might say, came with the house—consists of a French cook of great ability, a Spanish maid, and my own secretary, a girl of Swiss nationality whose high attainments and ambitions are only equaled by her moral altitude. This then was our little family group when the events I am about to chronicle were ushered in.

If one must have an agency in this matter, I can find no alternative to placing not the blame but rather the authorship, albeit innocent, on my younger son John who has only recently attained his eighth year, a lively child of singular beauty and buck teeth.

This young man has, during the last several years in America, become not so much an addict as an aficionado of that curious American practice, the chewing of bubble gum, and one of the pleasanter aspects of the early summer in Paris lay in the fact that the Cadet John had neglected to bring any of the atrocious substance with him from America. The child's speech became clear and unobstructed and the hypnotized look went out of his eyes.

Alas, this delightful situation was not long to continue. An old family friend traveling in Europe brought as a present to the children a more than adequate supply of this beastly gum, thinking to do them a kindness. Thereupon the old familiar situation reasserted itself. Speech fought its damp way past a huge wad of the gum and emerged with the sound of a faulty water trap. The jaws were in constant motion, giving the face at best a look of agony while the eyes took on a glaze like those of a pig with a recently severed jugular. Since I do not believe in inhibiting my children I resigned myself to a summer not quite so pleasant as I had at first hoped.

On occasion I do not follow my ordinary practice of laissez-faire. When I am composing the material for a book or play or essay, in a word, when the utmost of concentration is required, I am prone to establish tyrannical rules for my own comfort and effectiveness. One of these rules is that there shall be neither chewing nor bubbling while I am trying to concentrate. This rule is so thoroughly understood by the Cadet John that he accepts it as one of the laws of nature and does not either complain or attempt to evade the ruling. It is his pleasure and my solace for my son to come sometimes into my workroom, there to sit quietly beside me for a time. He knows he must be silent, and when he has remained so for as long a time as his character permits, he goes out quietly, leaving us both enriched by the wordless association.

Two weeks ago in the late afternoon, I sat at my desk composing a short essay for *Figaro Littéraire*, an essay which later aroused some controversy when it was printed under the title "Sartre Resartus." I had come to that passage concerning the proper clothing for the soul when, to my astonishment and chagrin, I heard the umistakable soft plopping sound of a bursting balloon of bubble gum. I looked sternly at my offspring and saw him chewing away. His cheeks were colored with embarrassment and the muscles of his jaws stood rigidly out.

"You know the rule," I said coldly.

To my amazement tears came into his eyes and while his jaws continued to masticate hugely, his blubbery voice forced its way past the huge lump of bubble gum in his mouth.

"I didn't do it," he cried.

"What do you mean, you didn't do it?" I demanded in a rage. "I distinctly heard and now I distinctly see."

"Oh sir!" he moaned, "I really didn't. I'm not chewing it, sir. It's chewing me."

For a moment I inspected him closely. He is an honest child, only under the greatest pressure of gain permitting himself an untruth. I had the horrible thought that the bubble gum had finally had its way and that my son's reason was tottering. If this were so, it were better to tread softly. Quietly I put out my hand. "Lay it here," I said kindly.

My child manfully tried to disengage the gum from his jaws. "It won't let me go," he sputtered.

"Open up," I said and then inserting my fingers in his mouth I seized hold of the large lump of gum and after a struggle in which my fingers slipped again and again, managed to drag it forth and to deposit the ugly blob on my desk on top of a pile of white manuscript paper.

For a moment it seemed to shudder there on the paper and then with an easy slowness it began to undulate, to swell and recede with the exact motion of being chewed while my son and I regarded it with popping eyes.

For a long time we watched it while I drove through my mind for some kind of explanation. Either I was dreaming or some principle as yet unknown had taken its seat in the pulsing bubble gum on the desk. I am not unintelligent. While I considered the indecent thing, a hundred little thoughts and glimmerings of understanding raced through my brain. At last I asked, "How long has it been chewing you?"

"Since last night," he replied.

"And when did you first notice this, this propensity on its part?"

He spoke with perfect candor, "I will ask you to believe me, sir," he said. "Last night before I went to sleep I put it under my pillow as is my invariable custom. In the night I was awakened to find that it was in my mouth. I again placed it under my pillow and this morning it was again in my mouth, lying very quietly. When, however, I became thoroughly awakened, I was conscious of a slight motion and shortly afterward the situation dawned on me that I was no longer master of the gum. It had taken its head. I tried to remove it, sir, and could not. You yourself with all of your strength have seen how difficult it was to extract. I came to your workroom to await your first disengagement, wishing to acquaint you with my difficulty. Oh, Daddy, what do you think has happened?"

The cancerous thing held my complete attention.

"I must think," I said. "This is something a little out of the ordinary, and I do not believe it should be passed over without some investigation."

As I spoke a change came over the gum. It ceased to chew itself and seemed to rest for a while, and then with a flowing movement like those monocellular animals of the order *Paramecium*, the gum slid across the desk straight in the direction of my son. For a moment I was stricken with astonishment and for an even longer time I failed to discern its intent. It dropped to his knee, climbed horribly up his shirt front. Only then did I understand. It was trying to get back into his mouth. He looked down on it paralyzed with fright.

"Stop," I cried, for I realized that my third-born was in danger and at such times I am capable of a violence which verges on the murderous. I seized the monster from his chin and striding from my workroom, entered the salon, opened the window and hurled the thing into the busy traffic on the rue de M—.

I believe it is the duty of a parent to ward off those shocks which may cause dreams or trauma whenever possible. I went back to my study to find young John sitting where I had left him. He was staring into space. There was a troubled line between his brows.

"Son," I said, "you and I have seen something which, while we know it to have happened, we might find difficult to describe with any degree of success to others. I ask you to imagine the scene if we should tell this story to the other members of the family. I greatly fear we should be laughed out of the house."

"Yes, sir," he said passively.

"Therefore I am going to propose to you, my son, that we lock the episode deep in our memories and never mention it to a soul as long as we live." I waited for his assent and when it did not come, glanced up at his face to see it a ravaged field of terror. His eyes were starting out of his head. I turned in the direction of his gaze. Under the door there crept a paper-thin sheet which, once it had entered the room, grew to a gray blob and rested on the rug, pulsing and chewing. After a moment it moved again by pseudopodian progression toward my son.

I fought down panic as I rushed at it. I grabbed it up and flung it on my desk, then seizing an African war club from among the trophies on the wall, a dreadful instrument studded with brass, I beat the gum until I was breathless and it a torn piece of plastic fabric. The moment I rested, it drew itself together and for a few moments chewed very rapidly as though it chuckled at my impotence, and then inexorably it moved toward my son, who by this time was crouched in a corner moaning with terror.

Now a coldness came over me. I picked up the filthy thing and wrapped it in my handkerchief, strode out of the house, walked three blocks to the Seine and flung the handkerchief into the slowly moving current.

I spent a good part of the afternoon soothing my son and trying to reassure him that his fears were over. But such was his nervousness that I had to give him half a barbiturate tablet to get him to sleep that night, while my wife insisted that I call a doctor. I did not at that time dare to tell her why I could not obey her wish.

I was awakened, indeed the whole house was awakened, in the night by a terrified muffled scream from the children's room. I took the stairs two at a time and burst into the room, flicking the light switch as I went. John sat up in bed squalling, while with his fingers he dug at his half-open mouth, a mouth which horrifyingly went right on chewing. As I looked a bubble emerged between his fingers and burst with a wet plopping sound.

What chance of keeping our secret now! All had to be explained, but with the plopping gum pinned to a breadboard with an ice pick the explanation was easier than it might have been. And I am proud of the help and comfort given me. There is no strength like that of the family. Our French cook solved the problem by refusing to believe it even when she saw it. It was not reasonable, she explained, and she was a reasonable member of a reasonable people. The Spanish maid ordered and paid for an exorcism by the parish priest who, poor man, after two hours of strenuous effort went away muttering that this was more a matter of the stomach than the soul.

For two weeks we were besieged by the monster. We burned it in the fireplace, causing it to splutter in blue flames and melt in a nasty mess among the ashes. Before morning it had crawled through the keyhole of the children's room, leaving a trail of wood ash on the door, and again we were awakened by screams from the Cadet.

In despair I drove far into the country and threw it from my automobile. It was back before morning. Apparently it had crept to the highway and placed itself in the Paris traffic until picked up by a truck tire. When we tore it from John's mouth it had still the nonskid marks of Michelin imprinted in its side.

Fatigue and frustration will take their toll. In exhaustion, with my will to fight back sapped, and after we had tried every possible method to lose or destroy the bubble gum, I placed it at last under a bell jar which I ordinarily use to cover my microscope. I collapsed in a chair to gaze at it with weary defeated eyes. John slept in his little bed under the influence of sedatives backed by my assurance that I would not let the Thing out of my sight.

I lighted a pipe and settled back to watch it. Inside the bell jar the gray tumorous lump moved restlessly about searching for some means of exit from its prison. Now and then it paused as though in thought and emitted a bubble in my direction. I could feel the hatred it had for me. In my weariness I found my mind slipping into an analysis which had so far escaped me.

The background I had been over hurriedly. It must be that from constant association with the lambent life which is my son, the magic of life had been created in the bubble gum. And with life had come intelligence, not the manly open intelligence of the boy, but an evil calculating wiliness.

How could it be otherwise? Intelligence without the soul to balance it must of necessity be evil. The gum had not absorbed any part of John's soul.

Very well, said my mind, now we have a hypothesis of its origin, let us consider its nature. What does it think? What does it want? What does it need? My mind leaped like a terrier. It needs and wants to get back to its host, my son. It wants to be chewed. It must be chewed to survive.

Inside the bell jar the gum inserted a thin wedge of itself under the heavy glass foot and constricted so that the whole jar lifted a fraction of an inch. I laughed as I drove it back. I laughed with almost insane triumph. I had the answer.

In the dining room I procured a clear plastic plate, one of a dozen my wife had bought for picnics in the country. Then turning the bell jar over and securing the monster in its bottom, I smeared the mouth of the jar with a heavy plastic cement guaranteed to be water-, alcohol- and acidproof. I forced the plate over the opening and pressed it down until the glue took hold and bound the plate to the glass, making an airtight container. And last I turned the jar upright again and adjusted the reading light so that I could observe every movement of my prisoner.

Again it searched the circle for escape. Then it faced me and emitted a great number of bubbles very rapidly. I could hear the little bursting plops through the glass.

"I have you, my beauty," I cried. "I have you at last."

That was a week ago. I have not left the side of the bell jar since, and have only turned my head to accept a cup of coffee. When I go to the bathroom, my wife takes my place. I can now report the following hopeful news.

During the first day and night, the bubble gum tried every means to escape. Then for a day and a night it seemed to be agitated and nervous as though it had for the first time realized its predicament. The third day it went to work with its chewing motion, only the action was speeded up greatly, like the chewing of a baseball fan. On the fourth day it began to weaken and I observed with joy a kind of dryness on its once slick and shiny exterior.

I am now in the seventh day and I believe it is almost over. The gum is lying in the center of the plate. At intervals it heaves and subsides. Its color has turned to a nasty yellow. Once today when my son entered the room, it leaped up excitedly, then seemed to realize its hopelessness and collapsed on the plate. It will die tonight I think and only then will I dig a deep hole in the garden, and I will deposit the sealed bell jar and cover it up and plant geraniums over it.

It is my hope that this account will set straight some of the silly tales that are being hawked in the neighborhood.

The Story of a Good Dog

by JAMES STEPHENS

A man I used to know very well told me this story. He was a very truthful kind of man, but he used to elaborate things more than a bit, and perhaps he elaborated a bit on this.

Everybody, said he, has a best cat or dog that remains in the mind when other very dear memories have faded, and one says with complete assurance: "That was the best dog." There were Fairy and Tommy and Guzzle and Spot, and they were all such good dogs that it is hard to believe there could be any better, but my best dog had not got a name at all; he answered to a very low whistle. He never barked; he never made any noise of any kind, except that, now and again, he gave a kind of whispered gargle away down in his innards—you could hardly hear it—and that indicated the top of his delight. Poor old fellow, he hadn't much to be delighted about: he was just delighted to be delighted.

This is how we met. It was evening, and I was going up a street and down a street. I was looking for something. Among other things I was looking for a job, but this time I was looking for something else—and suddenly I saw it. It was in a dog's mouth: it was nearly half a loaf of bread, and the dog was slinking up an alley with it. He was a large terrier kind of chap, and I was stalking him for my share of whatever was going. I got him to the end of the alley, and he whispered a few very low grunts of inquiry at me. "Drop it," said I, and he dropped it.

He sat down on his hunkers a few paces away, and he looked at the bread, and he looked at me, and then he scratched himself, and then he looked at the bread again. I broke the half-loaf into fairly even pieces, and I handed him the larger half. He looked at me, and he looked at the bread, and I could see that he was trying to work out where the catch was. Then he scratched himself with some fury, and when I began to eat, he began to eat. He would stop every now and then to take a good look at me, and then he made that curious whispered gargle of delight away down in his innards, and then he started again on the bread.

How good that bread was! I remember thinking that cake was not half as delicious as bread, and that this bread was the best that ever was baked; I could have eaten a hundred loaves of it, and then I could have eaten the dog.

It was evening and darkish, so I humped myself up for sleep just where I was, and the dog, very cautiously, came to me, and at last tightened himself up against me, and he gargled a little and scratched himself nearly all night. I didn't care about anything. I had a friend; and he cared less, for he had a friend too.

In the morning I saw what all the scratching was about. He was covered from head to foot with mange. He was almost a solid mass of scabs. One of his eyes was blind. He was about three years younger than I was—that is, he was rather old, and he looked at me out of his goodish eye with the benevolent adoration that a good dog reserves for its best pup. He knew that I was an incompetent person, and he was very glad of that, for he had made up his mind that he would feed me by day and keep me warm by night. It was winterish, and rainish, and darkish, and we wandered together up a place and down a place, and we kept carefully out of everybody's way. I didn't want people because they wouldn't give me a job, and he didn't want people because they heaved rocks at him.

For more than two months, whatever I ate he brought me. He was marvelously skillful. He knew where bits of bread grew. Sometimes there wasn't any, but most days there was a bit. I should have been very hungry but in those days my mind moved around at about a mile a minute and it despised stomachs.

One morning my good dog set out hunting as usual. Then, having gone but a few paces, he stopped. He came back and pushed his head against me. Then he moved away again, and stopped again. And then, suddenly, he lifted his head to the sky and howled—the first sound I have ever heard him make! He howled and howled as though he were trying to howl himself dead. My heart nearly burst with terror. I ran to him and took his head into my arms, whispering love words to him, and as I looked into his face I saw what was wrong.

His other eye was gone. He was quite blind. He couldn't go hunting. He wasn't howling about himself; he was howling because he couldn't nose out something for me to eat. He cared no more about himself than I, at that moment, cared about me. He did want to howl himself dead, but my arms coaxed him, and in a little he stood silent and shivering.

My mind had a small domain of its own, an aery, flighty, fanciful place, where nothing stood still for more than a minute, but my mind knew nothing of practical matters; it didn't know how to do anything. How should I feed my dog who was old, and blind, and nigh eaten to death by his diseases?

I picked him up—he was not a light dog—and I walked and walked and walked. There were fields on one side, with a dull sky over them, over us: the world was a box, and we were two rats in a trap. I came to a small place, and saw a chemist's shop in it; the door was open. I put the dog down behind the door and walked in. There was a young man—perhaps ten years older than I —behind the counter, and I said to him, "Please, will you kill my dog for me, without hurting him?"

He was a hard-faced, tough Northman, and he looked me up and down with eyes that were like bullets.

"What will you pay me with?" said he.

"I have no money," I answered.

"I've no painless poison," said he.

I looked at the rows of bottles on the counter and on the walls, and my next words were inspired; they were even crafty.

"You are a very wise man," I said. "There is nothing of this kind that *you* couldn't do."

His eyes became eyes again.

"What's wrong with the dog?" said he.

"He is old and blind and dying of the mange."

"Where is the creature?"

I pointed and he strode to look.

"Good God Almighty," said he, as he stared at the crouching dog. "Take that thing away."

I followed him into the shop.

"Listen," said I, "that is the best dog in the world. He has fed me for over two months."

"You ate out of that thing's mouth?" said he.

"Yes," I answered. "He went blind this morning, and he is dying of horror because he can't feed me."

The man looked at me as if I were demented.

"You know how to do everything," I said. "Do this for the best dog in the world."

He turned briskly, took up a pile of papers and placed them on the floor. "Stretch him on that," he ordered. I picked my dog up—he was all one jelly of trembling terror.

The young man went behind his counter, and in about five minutes he came again, carrying a bowl.

"Good God!" said he, as he looked at the dog, and then his face went gentle. "There is warm milk and bread and sugar—dogs love sugar," he added, "and there is just enough of something else that will end his troubles in no time."

I put the bowl to my dog's nose. He smelled, and smelled again, and then, with an astonishing joy, he began to lap and eat while I petted him. He was tasting a kind of food that perhaps he hadn't tasted for six or seven years. Not since his master of long ago had thrown him out, and flung rocks at him till he quit.

"Take him down to the railway embankment," said the young man. "He'll be gone in less than half an hour."

So I sat among the bushes with him, and he began doing and undoing things; he began to go asleep and he began to waken up, and he began to gargle joyfully, and then he began to forget these things, and all things.

He forgot blindness and age and fear. He forgot hunger, he forgot me, he forgot to scratch himself, he forgot life itself. He stretched himself a little, luxuriously, and then a small shiver ran all over him, and he was gone.

I pushed him deeply into the bushes, and walked away, pretty lonely again, but I think you will agree that when I say he was my best dog, I am not making any mistake in that very important matter.

Shortly after that I got a job—said the man who told me this story.

A Story

by DYLAN THOMAS

If you can call it a story. There's no real beginning or end and there's very little in the middle. It is all about a day's outing, by charabanc, to Porthcawl, which, of course, the charabanc never reached, and it happened when I was so high and much nicer.

I was staying at the time with my uncle and his wife. Although she was my aunt, I never thought of her as anything but the wife of my uncle, partly because he was so big and trumpeting and red-hairy and used to fill every inch of the hot little house like an old buffalo squeezed into an airing cupboard, and partly because she was so small and silk and quick and made no noise at all as she whisked about on padded paws, dusting the china dogs, feeding the buffalo, setting the mousetraps that never caught her; and once she sleaked out of the room, to squeak in a nook or nibble in the hayloft, you forgot she had ever been there.

But there he was, always, a steaming hulk of an uncle, his braces straining like hawsers, crammed behind the counter of the tiny shop at the front of the house, and breathing like a brass band; or guzzling and blustery in the kitchen over his gutsy supper, too big for everything except the great black boats of his boots. As he ate, the house grew smaller; he billowed out over the furniture, the loud check meadow of his waistcoat littered, as though after a picnic, with cigarette ends, peelings, cabbage stalks, birds' bones, gravy; and the forest fire of his hair crackled among the hooked hams from the ceiling. She was so small she could hit him only if she stood on a chair, and every Saturday night at half-past ten he would lift her up, under his arm, onto a chair in the kitchen so that she could hit him on the head with whatever was handy, which was always a china dog. On Sundays, and when pickled, he sang high tenor, and had won many cups.

The first I heard of the annual outing was when I was sitting one evening on a bag of rice behind the counter, under one of my uncle's stomachs, reading an advertisement for sheep-dip, which was all there was to read. The shop was full of my uncle, and when Mr. Benjamin Franklyn, Mr. Weazley, Noah Bowen, and Will Sentry came in, I thought it would burst. It was like all being together in a drawer that smelled of cheese and turps, and twist tobacco and sweet biscuits and snuff and waistcoat. Mr. Benjamin Franklyn said that he had collected enough money for the charabanc and twenty cases of pale ale and a pound apiece over that he would distribute among the members of the outing when they first stopped for refreshment, and he was about sick and tired, he said, of being followed by Will Sentry.

"All day long, wherever I go," he said, "he's after me like a collie with one eye. I got a shadow of my own *and* a dog. I don't need no Tom, Dick or Harry pursuing me with his dirty muffler on."

Will Sentry blushed, and said, "It's only oily. I got a bicycle."

"A man has no privacy at all," Mr. Franklyn went on. "I tell you he sticks so close I'm afraid to go out the back in case I sit in his lap. It's a wonder to me," he said, "he don't follow me into bed at night."

"Wife won't let," Will Sentry said.

And that started Mr. Franklyn off again, and they tried to soothe him down by saying, "Don't you mind Will Sentry." . . . "No harm in old Will." . . . "He's only keeping an eye on the money, Benjie."

"Aren't I honest?" asked Mr. Franklyn in surprise. There was no answer for some time, then Noah Bowen said, "You know what the committee is. Ever since Bob the Fiddle they don't feel safe with a new treasurer."

"Do you think *I'm* going to drink the outing funds, like Bob the Fiddle did?" said Mr. Franklyn.

"You *might*," said my uncle, slowly.

"I resign," said Mr. Franklyn.

"Not with our money you won't," Will Sentry said. "Who put the dynamite in the salmon pool?" said Mr. Weazley, but nobody took any notice of him. And, after a time, they all began to play cards in the thickening dusk of the hot, cheesy shop, and my uncle blew and bugled whenever he won, and Mr. Weazley grumbled like a dredger, and I fell to sleep on the gravy-scented mountain meadow of uncle's waistcoat.

On Sunday evening, after Bethesda, Mr. Franklyn walked into the kitchen where my uncle and I were eating sardines from the tin with spoons because it was Sunday and his wife would not let us play draughts. She was somewhere in the kitchen, too. Perhaps she was inside the grandmother clock, hanging from the weights and breathing. Then, a second later, the door opened again and Will Sentry edged into the room, twiddling his hard, round hat. He and Mr. Franklyn sat down on the settee, stiff and moth-balled and black in their chapel and funeral suits.

"I brought the list," said Mr. Franklyn. "Every member fully paid. You ask Will Sentry."

My uncle put on his spectacles, wiped his whiskery mouth with a handkerchief big as a Union Jack, laid down his spoon of sardines, took Mr. Franklyn's list of names, removed the spectacles so that he could read, and then ticked the names off one by one.

"Enoch Davies. Aye. He's good with his fists. You never know. Little Gerwain. Very melodious bass. Mr. Cadwalladwr. That's right. He can tell opening time better than my watch. Mr. Weazley. Of course. He's been to Paris. Pity he suffers so much in the charabanc. Stopped us nine times last year between the Beehive and the Red Dragon. Noah Bowen, ah, very peaceable. He's got a tongue like a turtledove. Never a argument with Noah Bowen. Jenkins Loughor. Keep him off economics. It cost us a plate-glass window. And ten pints for the Sergeant. Mr. Jervis. Very tidy."

"He tried to put a pig in the charra," Will Sentry said.

"Live and let live," said my uncle.

Will Sentry blushed.

"Sinbad the Sailor's Arms. Got to keep in with him. Old O. Jones."

"Why old O. Jones?" said Will Sentry.

"Old O. Jones always goes," said my uncle.

I looked down at the kitchen table. The tin of sardines was gone. By Gee, I said to myself, Uncle's wife is quick as a flash.

"Cuthbert Johnny Fortnight. Now there's a card," said my uncle.

"He whistles after women," Will Sentry said.

"So do you," said Mr. Benjamin Franklyn, "in your mind."

My uncle at last approved the whole list, pausing only to say, when he came across one name, "If we weren't a Christian community, we'd chuck that Bob the Fiddle in the sea."

"We can do that in Porthcawl," said Mr. Franklyn, and soon after that he went, Will Sentry no more than an inch behind him, their Sunday-bright boots squeaking on the kitchen cobbles.

And then, suddenly, there was my uncle's wife standing in front of the dresser, with a china dog in one hand. By Gee, I said to myself again, did you ever see such a woman, if that's what she is. The lamps were not lit yet in the kitchen and she stood in a wood of shadows, with the plates on the dresser behind her shining—like pink-and-white eyes.

"If you go on that outing on Saturday, Mr. Thomas," she said to my uncle in her small, silk voice, "I'm going home to my mother's."

Holy Mo, I thought, she's got a mother. Now that's one old bald mouse of a hundred and five I won't be wanting to meet in a dark lane.

"It's me or the outing, Mr. Thomas."

I would have made my choice at once, but it was almost half a minute before my uncle said, "Well, then, Sarah, it's the outing, my love." He lifted her up, under his arm, onto a chair in the kitchen, and she hit him on the head with the china dog. Then he lifted her down again, and then I said good night.

For the rest of the week my uncle's wife whisked quiet and quick round the house with her darting duster, my uncle blew and bugled and swole, and I kept myself busy all the time being up to no good. And then at breakfast time on Saturday morning, the morning of the outing, I found a note on the kitchen table. It said, "There's some eggs in the pantry. Take your boots off before you go to bed." My uncle's wife had gone, as quick as a flash.

When my uncle saw the note, he tugged out the flag of his handkerchief and blew such a hubbub of trumpets that the plates on the dresser shook. "It's the same every year," he said. And then he looked at me. "But this year it's different. *You'll* have to come on the outing, too, and what the members will say I dare not think."

The charabanc drew up outside, and when the members of the outing saw my uncle and me squeeze out of the shop together, both of us catlicked and brushed in our Sunday best, they snarled like a zoo.

"Are you bringing a *boy*?" asked Mr. Benjamin Franklyn as we climbed into the charabanc. He looked at me with horror.

"Boys is nasty," said Mr. Weazley.

"He hasn't paid his contributions," Will Sentry said.

"No room for boys. Boys get sick in charabancs."

"So do you, Enoch Davies," said my uncle.

"Might as well bring *women*."

The way they said it, women were worse than boys.

"Better than bringing grandfathers."

"Grandfathers is nasty too," said Mr. Weazley.

"What can we do with him when we stop for refreshments?"

"I'm a grandfather," said Mr. Weazley.

"Twenty-six minutes to opening time," shouted an old man in a panama hat, not looking at a watch. They forgot me at once.

"Good old Mr. Cadwalladwr," they cried, and the charabanc started off down the village street.

A few cold women stood at their doorways, grimly watching us go. A very small boy waved good-by, and his mother boxed his ears. It was a beautiful August morning.

We were out of the village, and over the bridge, and up the hill toward Steeplehat Wood when Mr. Franklyn, with his list of names in his hand, called out loud, "Where's old O. Jones?"

"Where's old O?"

"We've left old O behind."

"Can't go without old O."

And though Mr. Weazley hissed all the way, we turned and drove back to the village, where, outside the Prince of Wales, old O. Jones was waiting patiently and alone with a canvas bag.

"I didn't want to come at all," old O. Jones said as they hoisted him into the charabanc and clapped him on the back and pushed him on a seat and stuck a bottle in his hand, "but I always go." And over the bridge and up the hill and under the deep green wood and along the dusty road we wove, slow cows and ducks flying by, until "Stop the bus!" Mr. Weazley cried, "I left my teeth on the mantelpiece."

"Never you mind," they said, "you're not going to bite nobody," and they gave him a bottle with a straw.

"I might want to smile," he said.

"Not you," they said.

"What's the time, Mr. Cadwalladwr?"

"Twelve minutes to go," shouted back the old man in the panama, and they all began to curse him.

The charabanc pulled up outside the Mountain Sheep, a small, unhappy public house with a thatched roof like a wig with ringworm. From a flagpole by the Gents fluttered the flag of Siam. I knew it was the flag of Siam because of cigarette cards. The landlord stood at the door to welcome us, simpering like a wolf. He was a long, lean, black-fanged man with a greased love-curl and pouncing eyes. "What a beautiful August day!" he said, and touched his love-curl with a claw. That was the way he must have welcomed the Mountain Sheep before he ate it, I said to myself. The members rushed out, bleating, and into the bar.

"You keep an eye on the charra," my uncle said, "see nobody steals it now."

"There's nobody to steal it," I said, "except some cows," but my uncle was gustily blowing his bugle in the bar. I looked at the cows opposite, and they looked at me. There was nothing else for us to do. Forty-five minutes passed, like a very slow cloud. The sun shone down on the lonely road, the lost, unwanted boy, and the lake-eyed cows. In the dark bar they were so happy they were breaking glasses. A Shoni-Onion Breton man, with a beret and a necklace of onions, bicycled down the road and stopped at the door.

"Quelle un grand matin, monsieur," I said.

"There's French, boy bach!" he said.

I followed him down the passage, and peered into the bar. I could hardly recognize the members of the outing. They had all changed color. Beetroot, rhubarb and puce, they hollered and rollicked in that dark, damp hole like enormous ancient bad boys, and my uncle surged in the middle, all red whiskers and bellies. On the floor was broken glass and Mr. Weazley.

"Drinks all round," cried Bob the Fiddle, a small, absconding man with bright blue eyes and a plump smile.

"Who's been robbing the orphans?"

"Who sold his little babby to the gyppoes?"

"Trust old Bob, he'll let you down."

"You will have your little joke," said Bob the Fiddle, smiling like a razor, "but I forgive you, boys."

Out of the fog and babel I heard, "Come out and fight."

"No, not now, later."

"No, now when I'm in a temper."

"Look at Will Sentry, he's proper snobbled."

"Look at his willful feet."

"Look at Mr. Weazley lording it on the floor."

Mr. Weazley got up, hissing like a gander. "That boy pushed me down deliberate," he said, pointing to me at the door, and I slunk away down the passage and out to the mild good cows. Time clouded over, the cows wondered, I threw a stone at them and they wandered, wondering, away. Then out blew my uncle, ballooning, and one by one the members lumbered after him in a grizzle. They had drunk the Mountain Sheep dry. Mr. Weazley had won a string of onions that the Shoni-Onion man raffled in the bar. "What's the good of onions if you left your teeth on the mantelpiece?" he said. And when I looked through the back window of the thundering charabanc, I saw the pub grow smaller in the distance. And the flag of Siam, from the flagpole by the Gents, fluttered now at half mast.

The Blue Bull, the Dragon, the Star of Wales, the Twll in the Wall, the Sour Grapes, the Shepherd's Arms, the Bells of Aberdovey: I had nothing to do in the whole, wild, August world but remember the names where the outing stopped and keep an eye on the charabanc. And whenever it passed a public house, Mr. Weazley would cough like a billy goat and cry, "Stop the bus, I'm dying of breath." And back we would all have to go.

Closing time meant nothing to the members of that outing. Behind locked doors, they hymned and rumpused all the beautiful afternoon. And, when a policeman entered the Druid's Tap by the back door, and found them all choral with beer, "Sssh!" said Noah Bowen, "the pub is shut."

"Where do you come from?" he said in his buttoned, blue voice.

They told him.

"I got a auntie there," the policeman said. And very soon he was singing "Asleep in the Deep."

Off we drove again at last, the charabanc bouncing with tenors and flagons, and came to a river that rushed along among willows.

"Water!" they shouted.

"Porthcawl!" sang my uncle.

"Where's the donkeys?" said Mr. Weazley.

And out they lurched, to paddle and whoop in the cool, white, winding water. Mr. Franklyn, trying to polka on the slippery stones, fell in twice. "Nothing is simple," he said with dignity as he oozed up the bank.

"It's cold!" they cried.

"It's lovely!"

"It's smooth as a moth's nose!"

"Its *better* than Porthcawl!"

And dusk came down warm and gentle on thirty wild, wet, pickled, splashing men without a care in the world at the end of the world in the west of Wales. And, "Who goes there?" called Will Sentry to a wild duck flying.

They stopped at the Hermit's Nest for a rum to keep out the cold. "I played for Aberavon in 1898," said a stranger to Enoch Davies.

"Liar," said Enoch Davies.

"I can show you photos," said the stranger.

"Forged," said Enoch Davies.

"And I'll show you my cap at home."

"Stolen."

"I got friends to prove it," the stranger said in a fury.

"Bribed," said Enoch Davies.

On the way home, through the simmering moon-splashed dark, old O. Jones began to cook his supper on a primus stove in the middle of the charabanc. Mr. Weazley coughed himself blue in the smoke. "Stop the bus!" he cried, "I'm dying of breath." We all climbed down into the moonlight. There was not a public house in sight. So they carried out the remaining cases, and the primus stove, and old O. Jones himself, and took them into a field, and sat down in a circle in the field and drank and sang while old O. Jones cooked sausage and mash and the moon flew above us. And there I drifted to sleep against my uncle's mountainous waistcoat, and, as I slept, "Who goes there?" called out Will Sentry to the flying moon.

The Expert

by NAKAJIMA TON

There lived in the city of Hantan, the capital of the ancient Chinese state of Chao, a man called Chi Ch'ang who aspired to be the greatest archer in the world. After many inquiries, he ascertained that the best teacher in the country was one Wei Fei. So great was this Master's skill in archery that he was able, by repute, to shoot a quiverful of arrows into a single willow-leaf at the distance of a hundred paces. Chi Ch'ang journeyed to the far-away province where Wei Fei lived and became his pupil.

First Wei Fei ordered him to learn not to blink. Chi Ch'ang returned home and as soon as he entered his house, crept under his wife's loom and lay there on his back. It was his plan to stare without blinking at the treadle as it rushed up and down directly before his eyes. His wife was amazed to see him in this posture and said that she could not weave with a man, albeit her husband, watching from this strange angle. She was, however, constrained to work the treadle despite her embarrassment.

Day after day Chi Ch'ang took up his peculiar station under the loom and practiced staring. After two years he had reached the point of not blinking even if one of his eyelashes was caught in the treadle. When Chi Ch'ang finally crawled out for the last time from under the machine, he realized that his lengthy discipline had been effective. Nothing now could make him blink—not a blow on the eyelid, nor a spark from the fire, nor a cloud of dust raised suddenly before his eyes. So thoroughly had he trained his eye-muscles to inactivity that even when he slept his eyes remained wide open. One day as he sat staring ahead of him, a small spider wove its web between his eyelashes. Now at last he felt sufficiently confident to report to his teacher.

"To know how not to blink is only the first step," said Wei Fei when Chi Ch'ang had eagerly recounted the story of his progress. "Next you must learn to look. Practice looking at things, and if the time comes when what is minute seems conspicuous, and what is small seems huge, visit me once more."

Again Chi Ch'ang returned home. This time he went to the garden and searched for a tiny insect. When he had found one barely visible to the naked eye, he placed it on a blade of grass and hung this by the window of his study. Now he took up his post at the end of the room and sat there day after day staring at the insect. At first he could barely see it, but after ten days he began to fancy that it was slightly bigger. At the end of the third month it seemed to have grown to the size of a silkworm and he could now clearly make out the details of its body.

As Chi Ch'ang sat staring at the insect, he scarcely noticed the changing of the seasons—how the glittering spring sun changed to the fierce glare of summer; how before long the geese were flying through a limpid autumn sky; and how autumn in turn gave way to the sleety gray winter. Nothing seemed to exist now but the little animal on the blade of grass. As each insect died or disappeared, he had his servant replace it by another one equally minute. But in his eyes they were constantly becoming larger.

For three years he hardly left his study. Then one day he perceived that the insect by the window was as big as a horse. "I've done it!" he exclaimed, striking his knee, and so saying he hurried out of the house. He could scarcely believe his eyes. Horses seemed as big as mountains; pigs looked like great hills, and chickens like castle-towers. Bounding with joy, he ran back to his house and immediately notched a slender Shuo P'êng arrow on a Swallow bow. He took aim and shot the insect straight through the heart without so much as touching the blade of grass on which it rested.

He lost no time in reporting to Wei Fei. This time his teacher was sufficiently impressed to say, "Well done!"

It was five years since Chi Ch'ang had embarked on the mysteries of archery and he felt that his rigorous training had indeed borne fruit. No feat of bowmanship now seemed beyond his powers. To confirm this, he set himself a series of exacting tests before returning home.

First he decided to emulate Wei Fei's own accomplishment, and at the distance of a hundred yards he succeeded in shooting every arrow through a willow-leaf. A few days later he undertook the same task, using his heaviest bow and balancing on his right elbow a cup filled to the brim with water; not a drop was spilt and again every arrow found its mark.

The following week he took a hundred light arrows and shot them in rapid succession at a distant target. The first one hit the bull's-eye; the second one pierced the first arrow straight in the notch; the third arrow lodged itself in the notch of the second; and so it continued until in a twinkling all hundred arrows were joined in a single straight line extending from the target to the bow itself. So true had he aimed that even after he had finished the long line of arrows did not fall to the ground but remained quivering in mid-air. At this, even the Master Wei Fei, who had watched from the side, could not help clapping and shouting, "Bravo!"

When after two months Chi Ch'ang finally returned home, his wife, chafing at his long neglect, started to rail at him. Thinking to correct her shrewishness, Chi Ch'ang quickly notched a Ch'i Wei arrow on a Raven bow, drew the string to its fullest extension and fired just above her eye. The arrow removed three of her lashes, but so great was its speed and so sure the aim that she was not even aware that anything had happened, and, without so much as blinking, continued to nag at her husband.

There was nothing more for Chi Ch'ang to learn from his teacher Wei Fei. He seemed close to the achievement of his ambition. Yet one obstacle remained, he realized with an unpleasant jolt: that obstacle was Wei Fei himself. So long as the Master lived, Chi Ch'ang could never call himself the greatest archer in the world. Though he now equaled Wei Fei in bowmanship, he felt sure that he could never excel him. The man's life was a constant denial of his own great purpose.

Walking through the fields one day, Chi Ch'ang caught sight of Wei Fei far in the distance. Without a moment's hesitation, he raised his bow, fixed an arrow and took aim. His old master, however, had sensed what was happening and in a flash had also notched an arrow on his bow. Both men fired at the same moment. Their arrows collided half way and fell together to the ground. Chi Ch'ang immediately shot another arrow, but this was stopped in mid-air by a second unerring arrow from Wei Fei's bow. So the strange duel continued until the Master's quiver was empty but one arrow still remained to the pupil. "Now's my chance!" muttered Chi Ch'ang and at once aimed the final arrow. Seeing this, Wei Fei broke off a twig from the thorn-bush beside him. As the arrow whistled toward his heart, he flicked the point sharply with the tip of one of the thorns and brought it to the ground at his feet.

Realizing that his evil design had been thwarted, Chi Ch'ang was filled with a fine sense of remorse, which, to be sure, he would have been far from feeling had any of his arrows lodged where he intended. Wei Fei, on his side, was so relieved at his escape and so satisfied with this latest example of his own virtuosity that he could feel no anger for his would-be assassin. The two men ran up to each other and embraced with tears of devotion. (Strange indeed were the ways of ancient times! Would not such conduct be unthinkable today? The hearts of the men of old must have differed utterly from our own. How else explain that when the Duke Huan one evening demanded a new delicacy, the Director of the Imperial Kitchen, by name I Ya, baked his own son and begged the Duke to sample it; or that the fifteen-year-old youth, who was to be the first Emperor of the Shin Dynasty, did not scruple on the very night his father died to make love three times to the old man's favorite concubine?)

Even as he embraced his headstrong pupil in forgiveness, Wei Fei was aware that his life might any day be threatened again. The only way to rid himself of this constant menace was to divert Chi Ch'ang's mind to some new goal.

"My friend," he said, standing aside, "I have now, as you realize, transmitted to you all the knowledge of archery that I possess. If you wish to delve further into these mysteries, cross the lofty Ta Hsing Pass in the western country and climb to the summit of Mount Ho. There you may find the aged Master Kan Ying, who in the art of archery knows no equal in this or any age.

Compared to his skill, our bowmanship is as the puny fumbling of children. There is no man in the world but the Master Kan Ying to whom you can now look for instruction. Seek him out, if indeed he be still alive, and become his pupil."

Chi Ch'ang immediately set out for the West. To hear his achievements described as child's play had pricked his pride and made him fear that he might still be far from realizing his great ambition. He must lose no time in climbing Mount Ho and matching his own achievements against those of this old Master.

He crossed the Ta Hsing Pass and made his way up the rugged mountain. His shoes were soon worn out and his feet and legs were cut and bleeding. Quite undaunted, he clambered up perilous precipices and traversed narrow planks set over huge chasms. After a month he reached the summit of Mount Ho and burst impetuously into the cave where dwelt Kan Ying. He proved to be an aged man with eyes as gentle as a sheep's. He was, indeed, quite frighteningly old—far older than anyone Chi Ch'ang had ever seen. His back was bent, and as he walked his white hair trailed along the ground.

Thinking that anyone of such an age must needs be deaf, Chi Ch'ang announced in a loud voice, "I have come to find out if I am indeed as great an archer as I believe." Without waiting for Kan Ying's reply, he took the great poplar bow, which he was carrying on his back, notched a Tsu Chieh arrow and aimed at a flock of migrating birds which were passing by high overhead. Instantly five birds came hurtling down through the clear blue sky.

The old man smiled tolerantly and said, "But my dear Sir, this is mere shooting with bow and arrow. Have you not yet learned to shoot without shooting? Come with me."

Ruffled by his failure to impress the old hermit, Chi Ch'ang followed him in silence to the edge of a great precipice some two hundred paces from the cave. When he glanced down, he thought that he must indeed have come into the presence of "the great screen three thousand cubits high" described of old by Chang Tsai. Far below he saw a mountain stream winding its way like a shining thread over the rocks. His eyes became blurred and his head began to spin. Meanwhile the Master Kan Ying ran lightly on to a narrow ledge which jutted straight out over the precipice and, turning round, said, "Now show me your real skill. Come where I am standing and let me see your bowmanship."

Chi Ch'ang was too proud to decline the challenge, and without hesitation changed places with the old man. No sooner had he stepped on to the ledge, however, than it began to sway slightly to and fro. Assuming a boldness that he was far from feeling, Chi Ch'ang took his bow and with trembling fingers tried to notch an arrow. Just then a pebble rolled off the ledge and began to fall thousands of feet through space. Following it with his eye, Chi Ch'ang felt that he was going to lose his balance. He lay down on the ledge, clutching its edges firmly with his fingers. His legs shook and the perspiration flowed from his whole body.

The old man laughed, reached out his hand and helped Chi Ch'ang down off the ledge. Jumping on to it himself, he said, "Allow me, Sir, to show you what archery really is."

Though Chi Ch'ang's heart was pounding and his face was deadly white, he still had sufficient presence of mind to notice that the Master was empty-handed.

"What about your bow?" he asked in a sepulchral voice.

"My bow?" said the old man. "My bow?" he repeated laughing. "So long as one requires bow and arrow, one is still at the periphery of the art. Real archery dispenses with both bow and arrow!"

Directly above their heads a single kite was wheeling in the sky. The hermit looked up at it and Chi Ch'ang followed his gaze. So high was the bird that even to his sharp eyes it looked like a tiny sesame seed. Kan Ying notched an invisible arrow on an incorporeal bow, drew the string to its full extension and released it. Chi Ch'ang seemed to hear a swishing sound; the next moment the kite stopped flapping its wings and fell like a stone to the ground.

Chi Ch'ang was aghast. He felt that now for the first time he had glimpsed the limit of the art he had so glibly undertaken to master.

For nine years he stayed in the mountains with the old hermit. What disciplines he underwent during this time, none ever knew. When in the tenth year he descended from the mountains and returned home, all were amazed at the change in him. His former resolute and arrogant countenance had disappeared; in its place had come the expressionless, wooden look of a simpleton. His old teacher, Wei Fei, come to visit him, said after a single glance, "Now I can see that you have indeed become an expert! Such as I are no longer worthy even to touch your feet."

The inhabitants of Hantan hailed Chi Ch'ang as the greatest archer in the land and impatiently awaited the wonderful feats which he no doubt would soon display. But Chi Ch'ang did nothing to satisfy their expectations. Not once did he put his hands to a bow or arrow. The great poplar bow which he had taken with him on his journey he evidently had left behind. When someone asked him to explain, he answered in a languid tone, "The ultimate stage of activity is inactivity; the ultimate stage of speaking is to refrain from speech; the ultimate in shooting is not to shoot."

The more perceptive citizens of Hantan at once understood his meaning and stood in awe before this great expert archer who declined to touch a bow. It was his very refusal to shoot that now caused his reputation to grow.

All sorts of rumors and tales were bruited abroad about Chi Ch'ang. It was reported that always after midnight one could hear the sound of someone pulling an invisible bowstring on the roof of his house. Some said that this was the god of archery, who dwelt each day within the Master's soul and at night escaped to protect him from all evil spirits. A merchant who lived nearby circulated a rumor that one night he had clearly seen Chi Ch'ang riding on a cloud directly above his own house; for once he was carrying his bow, and was matching his accomplishments against those of Hou I and Yang Yu-chi, the famous archers of legendary times. According to the merchant's story, the arrows fired by the three Masters disappeared in the distance between Orion and Sirius, trailing bright blue lights in the black sky.

There was also a thief who confessed that, as he had been about to climb into Chi Ch'ang's house, a sudden blast of air had rushed through the window and struck him so forcefully on the forehead that he had been knocked off the wall. Thenceforth all those who harbored evil designs avoided the precincts of Chi Ch'ang's house, and it was said that even flocks of migrating birds kept clear of the air above his roof.

As his renown spread through the land, reaching to the very clouds, Chi Ch'ang grew old. More and more he seemed to have entered the state in which both mind and body look no longer to things outside but exist by themselves in restful and elegant simplicity. His stolid face divested itself of every vestige of expression; no outside force could disturb his complete impassiveness. It was rare now for him to speak, and presently one could no longer tell whether or not he still breathed. Often his limbs seemed stark and lifeless as a withered tree. So attuned had he become to the underlying laws of the universe, so far removed from the insecurities and contradictions of things apparent, that in the evening of his life he no longer knew the difference between "I" and "he," between "this" and "that." The kaleidoscope of sensory impressions no longer concerned him; for all he cared, his eye might have been an ear, his ear a nose, his nose a mouth.

Forty years after he had come down from the mountains, Chi Ch'ang peacefully left the world, like smoke disappearing in the sky. During these forty years he had never once mentioned the subject of archery, let alone taken up a bow and arrow.

Of his last year, the story is told that one day he visited a friend's house and saw lying on a table a vaguely familiar utensil whose name and use he could, however, not recall. After vainly searching his memory, he turned to his friend and said, "Pray tell me: that object on your table—what is it called and for what is it used?" His host laughed as if Chi Ch'ang were joking. The old man pressed his question but his friend laughed again, though this time somewhat uncertainly. When he was questioned seriously for a third time, a look of consternation appeared on the friend's face. He gazed intently at Chi Ch'ang and, having made sure that he had heard correctly and also that the old man was neither mad nor speaking in jest, he stammered out in an awe-struck tone, "Oh, Master. You must indeed be the greatest Master of all times. Only so can you have forgotten the bow—both its name and its use!"

It was said that for some time after this in the city of Hantan painters threw away their brushes, musicians broke the strings of their instruments, and carpenters were ashamed to be seen with their rules.

—Translated from the Japanese by Ivan Morris

Markie and the Snobs

by ANTHONY WEST

The Easter Eggs were much too big. Mrs. Welcome's girls could hardly stretch their arms around them. Even while Mr. Markus was saying heartily, "Go on, go ahead, open them up. See what's inside," he was aware of a blunder. The stuffed bears inside them were too large also. Mr. Markus was able to smile with his mouth only as he saw the discreet expressions which came over the girls' faces, like masks. "Oh, thank you, Mr. Markus," they said. Why did I have to be such a goop? he asked himself. He had telephoned the store to tell them to pick him out two really fabulous bears to be put in a pair of the biggest eggs they had in stock. He should have known that his gesture wasn't right in this context. Mrs. Welcome said, "Oh Markie. They're too beautiful they really are." She smiled at her daughters who stared at her. "Aren't they the most beautiful bears you've ever seen!" She had acquired the ability to enthuse in her teens, when she knew she wasn't pretty and had not yet learned that she was beautiful. She was thinking, poor Markie, how like him to get the girls nouveau riche bears. I do hope they won't be horrid to him. Poor lamb. He is so sweet, but so impossible. "They're awfully big," said Jessie, the older. Her sister immediately took that up: "I never saw such big bears before." Mr. Markus understood that these were criticisms, but grinned, to all appearance happily. "I told them at the bear factory that I had to have two special bears for two special friends of mine," he said. "I was doing my best to see that you were pleased." The girls repented of their coldness. "They're wonderful," Kathy said, "really . . ." Jessie caught her up on the dying fall, and broke in with a parody of her mother's manner, "They're the most beautiful presents we've ever had." Now they're pitying me for my bad taste, Mr. Markus thought. He gazed at the bears.

In Mrs. Welcome's sitting room they seemed, with their cute expressions, and the glossy linings in their ears, vulgar. There was no other word for it. Kathy took her bear out of the half egg in which it was lying. As she did so her pretty face was distorted by an involuntary grimace. "It's so big," she said, "almost as big as I am!" Mr. Markus saw the light. They like little toys. Miniatures. I suppose it's because they're all so damned big themselves. He stood up, smiling cheerfully. "Take me to see where these fellows are going to live," he said. "Yes," said Mrs. Welcome, "that would be fun. Do take Markie through to the nursery, girls. I know he'd love to see your treasures." A move would break into the awkwardness of the moment. "You don't really want to look at our toys, do you, Mr. Markus?" Jessie asked. She felt sure he wasn't that kind of person. He had the reddened, anxious face of a man with high blood pressure and often looked about him with the air of someone asking himself: how did I get into this? What am I doing here? He answered her: "Oh, I'd feel much easier in my mind if I knew I'd brought these two into a good home. I wouldn't want them to be unhappy you know." For this he managed an air of gravity. Both girls were impressed, against their better judgment. Mrs. Welcome had a hopeful moment. Perhaps after all the children and Markie might get on. He can be so very charming, she thought, in his way.

Mr. Markus admired the girls as they led him to the far end of the long narrow apartment. They were so tall for their age but they were not gawky. Although one was dark and the other fair they were remarkably alike, and very like their mother. They have her distinction, Mr. Markus told himself. They have the je ne sais quoi. It's patrician grace. They're thoroughbreds. If Mrs. Welcome would only marry him he would be able to give them everything they ought to have. They had not been bred to live in the reduced circumstances in which their mother found herself. He daydreamed luxuriously. In a year or two they would be mad about horses, all girls of a certain age were. He thought of how stunning they would look in really well cut britches and good boots. He knew all about where they would have to go to buy the right tack and the right riding clothes. He looked forward with enjoyment to all of that. He returned to the contemplation of realities as they reached the nursery door. They don't quite trust me, he thought. That counts with Betty. I must win them over.

As he entered the room he saw that his intuition had been correct. All the toys and dolls in sight were very small. "There, that's our bear garden," Kathy said. She was pointing out a doll's house. Mr. Markus, examining it, noticed that it was a Swiss chalet, an old toy of solid make. It stood on the deeply scratched top of a chest of drawers. This declared itself to be English, of walnut, and, Mr. Markus fought against the recognition, of the time of Charles the Second. Oh, no—he thought, peering into the interior of the chalet. He observed a bear, about three-and-a-half inches tall, seated in a miniature wing chair in the parlor holding a Maria Theresa dollar on its lap. "Why the coin?" he asked. His gaze involuntarily traveled away along the wall. There beyond the fireplace was the pair to the walnut chest of drawers. Oh, Betty, he thought, you slay me, you do. You scare me. How can you use a matched pair of Charles II walnut chests as nursery furniture? He knew enough to be sure of them as genuine pieces. What is going to become of you if you don't let me look after you? You are so helpless. He heard Jessie telling him that the coin was a badge to show that the bear lording it in the front downstairs room was the head of the family. "The father bear?" Mr. Markus asked, his heart brimming with tenderness. "Well, yes. I suppose so . . ." Jessie said. She was prepared to make concessions to adult idiocies but it wasn't her picture of it. The family included several monkeys made from twisted pipe cleaners, an ebony elephant, two woolen finches, and several small dolls with porcelain heads who were undoubtedly people, so she didn't see how the bear could be the father. He was the head of the family, that was all. Mr. Markus allowed himself to stroke her soft hair. He was overwhelmed by his desire to make life's shortcomings up to all little girls without fathers who consoled themselves with fantasies about families which were always together, always at home, and which had instantly recognizable heads and centers. He wanted to give the girls his promise that he would always be there, no matter what happened, to protect them from their mother's vagueness and inconsequence, from each other, from all uncertainty, from every menace. He restrained himself. It was too soon for that. Kathy was showing him a tiny book. "What is it?" he asked. "A book," she said in surprise. "Can't you see?" "Oh yes, I see that," he said. "I meant is it a story book. What kind of book is it?" Kathy's eyes darkened with suspicion. "Can't you read?" He laughed. "Oh yes, Miss Kathy, I can read. But I need my glasses for that. I'm farsighted. I can see well enough at a distance, but when I look at a page of print right under my nose all I see is a gray blur." "How horrid for you," Jessie said kindly. "Oh, I can manage quite well with my glasses," said Mr. Markus. He took his spectacles from his pocket and showed the children their case—not such as any ordinary person might have, but one made specially for Mr. Markus. It had an extra compartment which held a small bottle of cleaning fluid and two special cloths, one used for applying the fluid, and one for polishing the lenses. When Mr. Markus had performed his ritual of preparation he read the book aloud, sitting between the two girls on the nursery sofa. They were delighted. All was happiness until the girls called him Mr. Markus as they said goodnight. He was taking Betty Welcome out to dinner and on to a show in which he had an interest, "Goodnight Mr. Markus," they said, "and thank you very much for the bears."

"When will those kids start calling me Markie, like everyone else?" he said sadly to Mrs. Welcome in the taxi. "They've been taught to treat older people with a certain respect," Mrs. Welcome said. "It's a matter of good manners." "I want them to like me," Mr. Markus said. "Well you must give them time, Markie dear. They hardly know you yet." "That's true," he said. But he always knew instantly if he liked people or disliked them.

As soon as he was gone from the apartment, the girls had put their bears back inside the enormous eggs and asked Mrs. Welcome's Anna Groener to put them away in the store cupboard. Anna was blue eyed, fair, strong, and still very German after twenty years in the country. She despised Mr. Markus, and thought the less of Mrs. Welcome for allowing him into the house. She put the bears away with pleasure, happily looking forward to the disappointment she supposed that Mr. Markus would feel when he came to the apartment again and saw no trace of his expensive gifts. She hoped it would teach him the lesson that such a woman as Mrs. Welcome was not for him, and that he could have no place in her world.

After the theatre Mr. Markus took Mrs. Welcome to El Morocco for a light supper. "Betty," Mr. Markus said, "maybe I shouldn't say this. I don't have the right. But I couldn't help noticing those two chests in the nursery. The English walnut pieces. They're priceless. Do you know that? The right dealer would give you anything you were to ask for them. You could get twelve hundred, fourteen hundred dollars for each item. It's a crime . . ." "A crime Markie?" said Mrs. Welcome in her softest and vaguest manner. "Yes, I mean that, a crime—to leave such lovely things, valuable antiques, to be knocked to pieces by two kids. They're wonderful things, heirlooms. They should be treasured and cared for, until Jessie and Kathy are old enough to appreciate them." "They aren't so special. They're just two chests Gammy brought back from England, Markie," Mrs. Welcome said. "I think it's nice for the girls to grow up with pretty things around them." "You live in a dream, Betty," Mr. Markus said. "When are you going to let me start taking care of you? Why won't you marry me, Betty? Why not?" "Oh Markie," said Mrs. Welcome. "I don't want to be rushed. You promised me you weren't going to rush me." She retired behind the convenient rampart of her late husband's harrowing, and interminable, last illness. "I'm not ready for it yet." "Well say you might marry me, one day, Betty. Say I'm not dreaming an impossible dream. Tell me you like me, at any rate a little. Give me some hope." "I like you a lot, Markie, you know that. But about marriage I just don't know. Really, Markie, I just don't know." He put his hand on hers and looked down at their intertwined fingers. While he did that she smiled gently into his face, almost, but not quite, loving him, for his kindness, his inexhaustible vitality, his good looks, and his good intentions. If only, she thought, he were not quite so colorful, or quite so anxious.

Mrs. Welcome's brother did not approve of her friendship with Mr. Markus. She had lunched with him two days earlier and he had been blunt on that subject. "You aren't still seeing Ali Baba, are you? I can tell you right now that's not going to work." "But you introduced us, Tom," Mrs. Welcome said, grasping at a straw. He twitched it away. "Hell Betty, that was a joke, and you know it. I didn't mean you to take him seriously." "He's the sweetest man when you get to know him. I wish you weren't so stuffy and intolerant at times," Mrs. Welcome said. Tom said: "I'm tolerant. I don't mind the whiff of the Arabian Nights good old Markie carries round with him. I rather like it. But I know Mumsie won't, and that goes for most of our relatives and all your old friends." He had paused. "It's none of my business but you'd be cutting yourself off from an awful lot. And when I say that I'm not joking. You won't know what it means until you've done it. And then it will be too late."

Mrs. Welcome's way of admitting that she was a coward was to say that she hated unpleasantness, and rows. She now said, "Poor Markie. I'm not being fair to you. It's hateful of me to keep you on as a dangling man. Perhaps we ought to stop seeing each other?" He looked up quickly, his face darkening with distress as if he were blushing. "I don't think I could bear that," he said. "Can you bear to go on as we are?" she asked him. He said, "I can bear anything, Betty. I love you. Will you try to understand that?" He patted her hand, thinking I'm an idiot, I'm being idiotic. But I can't help myself.

When he next went to the apartment he noticed that the bears had vanished, with pleasure. The sooner they're forgotten the better, he told himself. He was standing in the nursery watching as the girls unwrapped more presents. Anna was in the room with her back as stiff as a ramrod, radiating contempt. The words 'what trash has he brought my girls this time?' were written all over her face. Mr. Markus had thought of her blue eyes and of the blonde cliff of her antipathy while he was choosing his gifts. The tissue paper rustled as the girls opened a way to the heart of the small packages. "A wax pear," said Jessie. "Mine's an apple," said Kathy. They were both a little taken aback. "So!" said Anna. "Now open the doors . . . Ach, Mr. Markus, I remember such apples and pears from when I was a girl! Look Jessie, like so." She disclosed the secret. Doors in the side of the pear opened on the stable in Bethlehem, the Mother and Child, Joseph and three tiny brocaded kings, a donkey and an ox. The Virgin was enthroned, surrounded by pink and white angels, in the apple. "They are beautiful, beautiful," said Anna. "Come Mrs. Welcome, see what lovely things Mr. Markus has brought." "Why, they're adorable Markie, just adorable," Mrs. Welcome said, looking at him fondly. Anna read too much into her expression, and decided that she should marry Mr. Markus. She changed her mind about him. He would be good to her girls. And he was rich. When Mrs. Welcome was married to him there would be no more anxieties over the monthly bills, and Anna would be able to stop worrying about what was to become of them all. Mr. Markus would do things properly. They would move to an apartment house where there was a doorman, and an elevator. There would be a cook, and a daily woman would come in. Anna had been with the Welcomes since the first child had been born, and because she loved them she had stayed on through the long run of ill fortune which had taken the nice, nice house on Seventy-Eighth Street, almost all the money, and poor Mr. Welcome. Mr. Markus would make Mrs. Welcome's world right for her again, heaven had sent him. Anna gave Mr. Markus a beam of confederacy, as binding as a formal treaty. Got her, he thought, and murmured in soft Bavarian German: "There's nothing prettier than a happy child is there Fräulein Groener?" She smiled, thinking, ah yes, he is a good kind man at heart. They should be married. It would be the sensible thing for Mrs. Welcome to do.

Mrs. Welcome thought and thought, and thought not. Mr. Welcome had died hard, inch by inch, but he had not died game. After his second operation he had turned very bitterly on life and had made Mrs. Welcome suffer for his knowledge that he was not to get well. He had always had that streak in him. Whenever things had not gone just as he wished, even in the best years of their marriage, he had made her pay for his disappointments by visiting the blame upon her. When he had gone, she was no longer required to make atonement to an affronted male will every time events beyond her control took an unexpected course. It was very pleasant, she found, not to be answerable to anyone for the workings of fate. And Markie, though he was so sweet, and so kind, did terribly want to put her life in order for her. She did not feel that Mr. Markus had it in him to be difficult—that was the word she adopted as a negotiable description of Mr. Welcome's brutality—but she knew that he wanted her to be more practical and more sensible than she really knew how to be. And that had been the beginning of the trouble with Mr. Welcome.

So there was no engagement, and no marriage, but there was a liaison. Anna Groener knew how it was, but chose to disregard the nature of the relationship, pretending that the established affair was a long courtship. At her direction the girls added a line to their evening prayers, adding, after their request for God's blessing on Gammy and Mumsie, "and please God make Mummy marry Markie."

The girls were not sure that they wanted that, even though their collections of small curiosities were increasing all the time, and Mr. Markus was very nice to them. He had a hoard of treasures which he had brought back with him when he had returned from the Far East by way of India after winding up his business in Shanghai at the end of the Thirties. He gave Jessie a flat box covered with mother-of-pearl inlay etched with a pattern of wavy lines that looked like ripples on the surface of the sea. Inside it were a hundred flat opalescent plaques cut in the shapes of fish. Fine incised lines made one side of each thin slab a scaly, finny, portrait, while the reverse was covered with lines of mysterious characters. Jessie wondered if they were poems or magic spells, and imagined that if they were read aloud they would make a sound like birds talking. "What does it say?" she said one day, holding one of the fish out to Markie. He took it, put on his spectacles, considered it, and suddenly produced a strong, coarse, jostling sound, like that of a viscous liquid being poured rapidly out of a narrow necked bottle. He stopped as abruptly as he had begun. "That's what it says," he said. "Was that really Chinese?" Kathy said, going on with "Oh Markie, you are wonderful. You know so much. I think you know everything." "But what does it mean, Markie?" Jessie said. Mr. Markus twinkled at her. "The seventeenth gem in the fortunate gourmet's pleasure giving guide to the desirably edible fishes of the seas and rivers of the flowery kingdom, the youth restoring—ah—sea bream, I guess. And then it goes on to say what time of year it comes into the markets, how to tell a fresh one from a stale one, and some good ways of cooking it. They say it's specially good baked in a sweet sauce." While Jessie was sadly regretting the flight of all magic that there had been in the box, Kathy was asking Mr. Markus if he had ever eaten sweetness and fish together. He said he had. "But Markie," she said "that must be awful." He said no, and told her that at Canton he had eaten tiny speckled fish, like dwarf trout, which had been steeped in honey so that they were like crystallized fruits. "Did you enjoy them?" Kathy said incredulously. "I should bubbling well say I did," Mr. Markus said. "Mmm they were de-licious." "Bubbling well?" asked Jessie, her face a question mark. "It's a joke, lovey," Mr. Markus said. "A British joke. There's a Bubbling Well Road in Shanghai. I lived in it. Then all of a sudden one year it was a catch phrase. Everyone seemed to be using it. 'You'd bubbling well better get a move on, old boy,' they used to say; or 'that bubbling well won't do, old man'; or 'like it or not, old chap, you'll bubbling well have to lump it.' " That he might have been speaking Greek was apparent to Mr. Markus from Jessie's blank face. He reverted to comprehensible memories and spoke of dark brown, woolly looking dromedaries seen under the walls of Peking, of summer picnics in a deserted porcelain pagoda by a reedy lake, of a white pony called Honeypot who had a passion for cinnamon toast. At the end of that story he said: "I'll tell you what. We'll play a joke on Mummy. There's a Chinese restaurant downtown where they know me. I'll take you there for Sunday lunch and we'll have a carp baked in sweet sauce as the *pièce de résistance*. You have to order it two days in advance, and they'll only do it for friends of the house—like me. We won't warn Mummy what's coming, and we'll watch her face when she finds she's eating sweet fish." "Poor Mummy," said Kathy, "suppose she hates it?" Mr. Markus saw an even more vivid expression of doubt on Jessie's face. "Don't worry about that," he said quickly. "I'll have spare ribs ordered too. Betty will get something good to eat, something she likes, you can be sure of that. I don't play horrid jokes on people, you ought to know it by now." They were guilty and contrite, and said it would be wonderful to go down to Chinatown for Sunday lunch.

So on Sunday morning Mr. Markus came by in his white convertible with the red leather seats and drove them to his Chinese restaurant. Mr. Markus really was a friend of the house, and he expanded happily when the owner, surrounded by sons and nephews, came beaming forward to greet him. His face shone as he talked and joked with them in rapid, fluent, Shanghai dialect. Other, less privileged, less accomplished hosts of parties at nearby tables were seen to admire and envy the performance while affecting to ignore it. Jessie watched it and wondered if anyone should spend so much of themselves on establishing whatever it was that Mr. Markus was trying to affirm. She found the baked carp more curious than delicious; it made her think of ginger snaps, and a certain kind of dark brown English marmalade which she refused to like as well as a pale gold transparent sort that was cheaper and supposed to be inferior. She heard Mrs. Welcome telling Markie that she had never eaten anything so good in her whole life. The remark reminded Jessie of the huge bears with shiny fur which had been shut up for over two years now in a trunk in the storage space in the basement. There was something excessive about Mr. Markus, and he encouraged exaggerations. "Did you ever eat anything like this, Jessie?" he said turning toward her. "Don't you think it's just gorgeous?" "I think it's quite nice," she said, hoisting her small banner of resistance, "I think I would like some of the spare ribs." "That's right. That's my girl," said Mr. Markus. He addressed Mrs. Welcome and Kathy: "Jessie has the idea. At a Chinese meal you eat a little of this and a little of that. She's caught on. The thing is contrast and combination. That's the secret of Chinese cuisine." He covertly examined Jessie to see if the moment had passed. She was looking down at her plate with a closed expression on her face. Mr. Markus hurried on, lecturing: "You know what, only two countries in the world have cuisines—China and France. A mature cuisine is the hallmark of a genuine culture, the *sine qua non.*"

As they were leaving the owner gave the two girls presents, small dragons with articulated bodies made of shiny red paper. Their ears were lined with white fur, and the scent of spices, and perhaps sandalwood, clung to them. "Mr. Yu is a good scout, and an old friend," said Mr. Markus on the way uptown. "When he was getting started here, city hall gave him a little trouble. I was able to help him. They don't forget a thing like that, Chinese." Jessie looked at her mother and wondered if she would tell Mr. Markus about the green bronze bell which hung on a gallows in the middle of a grove of fine needled pines at the edge of the pond in front of Gammy's house near Boston. Uncle John, who lived with her, called it 'grandfather's bell' and knew how to make it speak softly for visiting children by striking it in the right place with the heel of his closed fist. He took pleasure in showing them the English inscription cut into the metal where there had once been a vacant space among the curlicues and characters covering most of its outer surface: 'The merchant Ma Tszu Shih gives his American Friend Wm Truelove Mason this bell in gratitude, April 1878.' "The China trade was our big thing in those days," Uncle John said, making the bell speak again. "William Truelove made a pot of money out of old Shih Ma Tszu, and old Shih Ma Tszu made a pot of money out of Truelove. That's why this bell makes such a contented sound." But Mrs. Welcome did not say a word about the bell, or the China trade, to Mr. Markus. Nor did Jessie, though she always thought about them for an instant whenever she smelled Chinese tea, and very often had daydreams of turning herself into a boy so that she could go to Canton to buy shiploads of it from robed mandarins and make back all the Mason money that Mr. Welcome had managed to lose before he became ill.

In the summer of the year after that, Mrs. Welcome and the girls made their usual round of visits to relatives who had houses beyond East Hampton on Long Island, or on the Vineyard, or at Newport, or on the Cape. For a time Mr. Markus was out of the picture. But in August, when Kathy had gone off to camp, Mrs. Welcome and Jessie went to stay with him at his country place in the Berkshires. He drove to New York in the white convertible to pick them up. He said that he had business in town that day, and that it would be no trouble. Jessie knew as soon as she heard this story that it was untrue. She said, "We can't let him do it, Mummy, really we can't." "I suppose we shouldn't," Mrs. Welcome said with a nicely judicial air. "But it is the sort of thing he likes to do, you know. There will be no stopping him." "But," Jessie said, and fell silent. It had been in her mind to say that they mustn't let Markie weaken them, but while putting the thought into words she had become unsure of what exactly she meant. I mustn't, she told herself, be too much of a prig. She repeated this admonition when Mr. Markus came to the apartment to fetch them away. He made his appearance in brown and white shoes, a pale coffee and cream colored silk suit, and a white shirt with a silk square in a Paisley design tucked in at the neck. "Oh Markie, you look so cool and fresh," Mrs. Welcome said. "You are a marvel." While she was speaking, the dark anxiety went out of his face. He was afraid that the months among her iron gray and beige relatives would have turned her against him. "Betty, you look like a million dollars to me," he said, taking her by both hands and worshipping. "Believe me, I never saw you looking so well." He became aware that he was ignoring Jessie and turned to her, to be surprised to find how much more of an identity to be reckoned with she was than he had expected. "My," he said, "you've grown this summer. You've become quite a young woman." Mrs. Welcome was, for the moment, startled into recognition of her daughter as a person. She recoiled from that. "Don't be ridiculous, Markie; Jessie may be tall for her age, but she is only just fifteen, she is still only a child . . ." She was astonished by the sharpness which had come into her tone. She abandoned the subject. "Do you want to leave at once, Markie? We are all packed and ready if you do. Or would it be more convenient to lunch here before we start?" "We'll eat on the road," Mr. Markus said. "I have everything." "Well then . . ." Mrs. Welcome smiled her most charming smile. "A picnic will be fun won't it, Jessie?" As her daughter agreed to that, a lethal sentence shaped itself in Mrs. Welcome's mind. It had formed itself like a pearl round the grain of sand of Markie's observation of the change in Jessie: What a lot of growing up the girls have done while this thing with Markie has been dragging on. . . . "Let's go," she said, clapping her hands. "Let's go."

Mr. Markus had a picnic for them in the chilly interior of an insulated container: there were fillets of boned and skinned smoked trout, a ripe Brie cheese, a French loaf, Comice pears, and grapes. There was iced champagne in one vacuum flask, hot coffee in another, milk in a third, and ginger ale for Jessie in a fourth. There was a folding table and there were folding chairs. "This is perfect, Markie, just perfect; you have thought of everything," Mrs. Welcome said. They had turned off the main road, and were in a meadow intersected by a stream. Queen Anne's Lace made a white mist under the trees along its banks. After lunch they drove onward, to Jessie it seemed to be forever, through one village after another in which each house seemed to be lying panting in the heavy shadow of its surrounding maples. The day had become very hot. Jessie simulated sleep on the back seat, doing her best to ignore the rushing air, the jouncing, and the mileage. There was conversation, at a discreetly low pitch, in the front of the car. *"Elle est mécontente la petite,"* Mr. Markus murmured. "Her French is better than ours, Markie," Mrs. Welcome said. "She has been at the Lycée for two years." "I'm sorry," Mr. Markus said. "You mustn't mind so, when I tease you a little," Mrs. Welcome said. "In the army they thought my French was pretty good," Mr. Markus said. "Oh Markie, please don't be cross," said Mrs. Welcome, "it's just too hot." There was a pause. "She isn't, that one, upset by anything —this situation, for instance?" "Of course not." Mrs. Welcome pulled her scarf from her head, and shook out her hair. "At least, I don't think so." They presently left the blacktop road. Mr. Markus turned and touched Jessie's knee. She affected to wake, and sat up. "Almost there, girlie," he said. At the entrance to Mr. Markus's driveway Jessie saw the sign: a swinging board lettered with the words Do-Re-Mi Farm hung from a wrought iron bracket which featured the treble clef and a number of notes. "Is that the name of your house?" Jessie asked, leaning forward. "That was what it was called when I bought it, honey," Mr. Markus said.

They ate dinner in a grape arbor by the light of candles which stood inside tall glass chimneys on the glass top of a white painted cast iron table. The cushions on the seats of the iron chairs were of yellow glazed chintz on which a bold pattern of flowers had been printed in brown and white. Mr. Markus's manservant waited on them, a plump character actor playing the part of the old family retainer. Jessie saw that he was sizing up the situation from behind his happy idiot's smile, and trying to gauge how great a menace Mrs. Welcome might be to the long standing arrangement by which Mr. Markus kept him at ease at the farm the year round, doing very little work except on weekends and through the three summer months. Mr. Markus trotted him out. "Fellowes has ruled me with a rod of iron ever since I came back from China," he said. "Haven't you, Fellowes?" "You wouldn't know Mr. Markus for the same man, Mizz Welcome, the way he was then," Fellowes said. He clapped his hands loudly with a startling effect. The suddenness of it made Jessie and Mrs. Welcome jump. "Can you imagine, Mizz Welcome. When that man first come home he had the fool idea he could call me that way. I ain't no Chinaman I told him. He didn't like that one bit. No sir. He was quite a handful for a year or two, and no mistake." Mr. Markus chipped in: "Fellowes flatters himself that he reformed me. But it wasn't so. That was all Selma's doing." Mrs. Welcome smiled encouragingly at Fellowes who obliged with what seemed to be a set piece. "Yes, sir. Cupboard lore, that was the secret—this greedy man didn't dare fire me, Mizz Welcome, when I got firm with him, 'cause he knew Selma wouldn't stop with him if I was to go. I truly believe he'd just about die if he didn't have that woman to humor him by cooking him all his cranky dishes and indulging him in all his little fads. He couldn't live without that woman, Mizz Welcome." "Well, I can understand that," said Mrs. Welcome, rising to the occasion. "I don't know when I last ate such a beautifully cooked meal. Selma is a genius, she really is." "That's what they tell me, Mizz Welcome," Fellowes said, "that's what they all tell me." He made an unnecessary adjustment to the arrangement of cups on the coffee tray and then left them. "Isn't Fellowes just wonderful," began Mr. Markus, "he . . ." Jessie had lifted her eyes from her plate of peach ice cream and was considering him. "What do you suppose he is like, really," she said into the void created by Mr. Markus's unfinished sentence. "I mean when he is not acting, what is he like then?" "What an extraordinary question, darling," said Mrs. Welcome, attempting an interposition. "What can have put such a strange idea into your head?" Mr. Markus disregarded her and repeated the words "when he is not acting?" half to himself on a rising tone of interrogation. "I have no idea," he said bleakly, with an expression of astonishment on his face. Jessie ate a spoonful of Selma's extremely tasty ice cream. Mr. Markus's high color heightened. "You know," he said, "nobody has ever had the nerve to call me on Fellowes before. And," he leaned across the table toward Jessie, "why in hell should they? I suppose Fellowes is lazy, and spoiled, and I imagine that he has been robbing me blind all these years, but what harm does it do to you if I like to pretend that he is a terrific guy and more a friend than a servant? Who cares? Why shouldn't I have it that way if I want it?" "Oh Markie, you are taking Jessie far too seriously," said Mrs. Welcome comfortingly. "She was only joking." Jessie took another spoonful of ice cream. "You will allow that the ice cream is good though, won't you?" asked Mr. Markus. "You can go along with me so far as to admit that Selma is a good cook?" "Oh, yes," Jessie met his furious eye, "Selma can cook very well." She jacked up the pitch of her voice and spoke rapidly, gushingly: "Oh Markie, this is the best ice cream I ever ate, it really is." Her voice dropped to its normal tones. "Will that do? Is that what you require?" "It is not," snapped Mr. Markus. "You are being very rude, Jessie," said Mrs. Welcome. "I think you must be overtired. It would be best if you were to go straight to bed." Jessie stood up. She was unable to prevent her eyes from filling with tears. I am a child, and possibly I am stupid too, she thought; after all, what am I trying to prove? She said, "I am sorry. I didn't mean to be rude, Mr. Markus. Goodnight." She touched her mother's shoulder. "Goodnight Mummy," she said. Mr. Markus's iron chair fell backward with a crash as he stood up. "Forget the whole thing," he said. "We had a long hot drive." He stroked the back of his head with an uncertain hand. "We've never had even a little spat before. You can't be real friends with anyone until you've had a quarrel with them. That's what they say. Don't let this worry you. It hasn't worried me." "That was sweet of you, Markie," said Mrs. Welcome. "Now run along, pet, and sleep well."

Jessie left them together, with Mr. Markus stooping to pick up the fallen chair and Mrs. Welcome giving him a barely audible word of comfort which had as its shaky basis the phrase "girls of that age." Looking back over her shoulder at the two candlelit figures, Jessie felt the arbitrariness of their association. Summer lightning flickered from beyond the hills to the west, and there was an immense chirring of insects from beyond the circle of light. There is no connection between them and anything, she thought.

In the morning Mrs. Welcome had breakfast in bed. Jessie encountered Mr. Markus alone. "Hi there, young lady," he said. "What would you say to a ride on a lovely morning like this?" Thunder after midnight had freshened the air. Jessie felt called upon to be conventionally responsive. "A ride would be wonderful, Markie," she said. "I haven't been on a horse since I don't know when." "You mean since last summer, don't you?" said Mr. Markus venturing out onto the thin ice of their changed relationship. Jessie decided to follow him. "Well yes, I do," she admitted. "But it wouldn't have been right to say so; it wouldn't have been enthusiastic enough, would it?" Toast popped up in the toaster and Jessie attended to it. "Don't you want to go riding with me, Jessie?" said Mr. Markus. "It will be too bad if you don't. I've been to a lot of trouble to get good horses. It won't be just a routine bore, will it?" "Oh no, Markie. I really do love to ride." She sighed. "But I wish you didn't take so much trouble over things. Occasions of delight don't come from taking trouble, you know." Mr. Markus watched her drink coffee; he said, "How do you think they would come about, then, these occasions of delight of yours, if no one took any trouble arranging for them?" "They come naturally out of doing what has to be done, Markie," Jessie said. "That is why life is so much worth living." Mr. Markus threw his head back, laughing. He rejoined her, pulling a handkerchief from his pocket and dabbing at the corners of his eyes. "Forgive me. I couldn't help but laugh. You've been reading a book Jessie, and I've been taking you too seriously. You are still a child, as your mother says." "That's unfair, Markie," Jessie said. "Give me some more coffee." When he had refilled her cup, he said "Unfair, perhaps. But it's true that you are playing a game, isn't it?—you're being someone else, an ideal character out of a book, aren't you?" "Well you should know all about that," she said, adding thoughtfully, "but I do it for fun. I am not insecure." "Ha," said Mr. Markus. "Betty should never have sent you to the Lycée, they have turned you into a young monster." "Oh, not completely," Jessie said. She occupied herself for the moment with loading the toaster. "I couldn't handle our scene last night, for instance." "But then you were overtired," said Mr. Markus, kindly. Jessie smiled. "You took that point neatly," she said. "I can see you are going to be good at my game. You learn things quickly." "Nobody has ever given you a good spanking, I imagine," said Mr. Markus. Jessie shook her head. "It is too late for that short cut," she said, "or at least it is out of the question for a man to think of that solution—with a girl of my age. We all know too much about psychology these days." Mr. Markus stood up. "I am going to tell them we will want the horses in about twenty minutes," he said, "if that will suit you." She nodded and ran her eyes over him. He was wearing a white shirt, white britches, and very soft, very beautifully polished pale brown riding boots. He had the usual silk square round his throat. Her eyes enlarged slightly. "I gather you have a thought about my riding clothes," he said. "You shouldn't care about that, Markie," she said. "It should be a matter of indifference to you." "But what in hell is wrong with them?" he asked. "You mustn't ask such questions," she said. "Really you must not." His face darkened. He said, "This is outside the game. I want to know." She drew invisible circles on the tablecloth with her fingertip. "They make you look like the hero in a Hollywood movie about polo players," she said reluctantly. "Not a new movie, either. You would see it at the Modern Museum. Laura la Plante could be in it. But the thing is you've taken too much trouble again. It's all wrong. I believe you have memorized some principle about clothes." He stared, and then looked glum. "A deliberate casualness," he said. " 'Studied insouçiance.' I got the idea from a book. The hero was very 'comme il faut.' It impressed me at the time." Jessie mouthed a silent 'Oh,' raising her eyebrows. "Are you instinctively a snob?" he asked her, "or were you given lessons?" "It is a matter of background," she said, "one just breathes it in." "Oh hell's bells," he said. "The horses are coming in twenty minutes." He left her. The toast popped up and she ate it.

The ride was pleasant. A long sweeping round took them through ferny woods and across open upland pastures from which blue distances were visible. In one valley bottom, silence was trapped under the canopy of a thick growth of large trees. In the shadowed hush they were faced with a choice of ways, one obviously more frequently taken than the other. Mr. Markus quoted Frost. Jessie said, "No," sharply. "I thought all you young people liked Frost nowadays," he said. "That isn't the point, Markie," said Jessie, "as you very well know." He sulked. They went on up the mossy, less trodden, route. "It seems harmless," he said, "to quote a poem, which is, after all, appropriate enough to that particular spot." "You could have it lettered on a board, and put up there," she said. "That would be a very vulgar thing to do," he said. "Yes," Jessie said. "It would be vulgar." "Don't think I don't get it," said Mr. Markus, flushing. His face took on its excited, how-the-hell-did-I-get-into-this, expression. "Do you hate me? Are you jealous of me for taking up so much of your mother's time? What are you up to?" He hesitated, concluding lamely, "for God's sake!" "How could I be so open with you if I didn't like you, Markie?" she said. "I am very, very fond of you." She examined his face. "I mean it, Markie, I really mean it." The track came out onto an open mountain top, and a dead level of over a mile stretched away before them, ending on an uphill slope rising to another crestline. "We can gallop here," said Mr. Markus sullenly, and muttered on: "If you will do this to someone you are fond of now, what won't you do to the men you love, later on?" "I won't gush at them, and pretend weaknesses are qualities," she said angrily. Her horse, eager to be off, became skittish. "Well, you will have a rough time of it then," said Mr. Markus, "that I can promise you." He rather hoped her horse would take charge and gallop off with her as it wanted. But she kept the animal in hand and waltzed it round in circles until it was submissive, and would stand, quite still, where she intended, with its rolling, passionate eye on the open homeward track ahead. "You certainly know your stuff with horses," Mr. Markus said reluctantly, regretted the opening he had given her, and set spurs to his horse. She had been watching him and was not one tenth of a second behind him in taking off. The round brought them out at the foot of Mr. Markus's driveway. When they reached it, two men with a dark green pickup truck were filling in a hole close to the mail box. The board saying Do-Re-Mi Farm, the iron bracket which had supported it, and the stout post from which it had hung, were to be seen in the bed of the truck. "Hi ya Mr. Markus," the men said, almost in unison. "I asked you to get this done first thing, didn't I?" Mr. Markus said. "We was held up," said the older of the two men. "You might, just now and again, do what I ask," said Mr. Markus. "If you aren't satisfied," the older man began heavily. "Oh skip it," Mr. Markus said; his face was brilliant. "Now we got this thing down, what do you want done with it?" The older man sensed Mr. Markus's embarrassment and bore down. "Do you want it in the barn?" "Burn it. Do anything you like. Anything, just so that I don't see it again," Mr. Markus said; he urged his horse forward. Jessie faced hers front and rode on beside him. When they came within sight of the house, they saw Mrs. Welcome waving to them from beneath the hood of a cane chaise longue which had been wheeled out of the summer house and placed on the terrace for her. They waved back, smiling. "Well, this has been the damn'dest beginning to two weeks I've been looking forward to all summer," Mr. Markus said. "I've always dreamed of how wonderful it was going to be when I got Betty to come up here at last. I never imagined it would be like this." "I don't know what you are talking about," Jessie said. "We have had a marvelous ride, haven't we?" Her eyes told him nothing of what she might be thinking. "Oh, yes, yes indeed," he said, and it was left at that. He regarded her back as they rode round to the stables behind the barn and the farm buildings. Her figure was very slender and her immaturity manifest. She is a child, why do I have to care what she thinks of me? was his thought. It remained the case that he did care.

"What was it like?" Kathy said when they were together again in the New York apartment. "It was horrible," Jessie said. "Mummy gushed all the time, and silly Markie crawled." "What about Markie?" Kathy said. "I mean, what about him?" "I can't do these braids for you if you won't keep your head still," Jessie said. Kathy sighed, and looking at herself in the oval hand mirror she was holding, made a moue with her mouth and said, "Do you think I look sexy yet, Jessie? Am I going to be attractive to men?"

"Of course you are," Jessie said. "You are going to be a knockout when the time comes." "You didn't say about Markie," Kathy said. "He lives too much in the world's regard," Jessie said. "I don't know what that means," Kathy said. "Well, you will learn, and soon enough," Jessie said, "if you go on worrying about whether you are going to be attractive to men or not." "You are just jealous, because you know you are not pretty," Kathy said. "I mean to be a person, not a glorified doll," Jessie said. "I don't envy you one bit." "What do you mean though, really, about Markie?" asked Kathy. "He has no guts." Jessie completed the braids with ribbons. "He wants to be someone else, someone who isn't Markie." Kathy stood up swinging her head, watching herself in the pier glass. She spun round. "These braids aren't a success. I have the look of a Dutch doll. Who does Markie want to be?" "It isn't a question of who, it's a matter of what," Jessie said. "Oh," Kathy looked disappointed. "If all you mean is that he would like to be one of us! Why that's something I've always known. And anyway I should think anyone would." She examined her image in the larger glass in the small oval of the hand mirror. "After all," she said, "we are part of one of the oldest families. . . . Why are you doing that?" Jessie had put fingers in her ears. "Because I don't wish to hear you talking nonsense," she said, taking them out. "We are growing apart, do you know that?" Kathy said, "I love Markie." "He is poisonous," Jessie declared passionately. "That's just ridiculous, he's the kindest and sweetest person there ever was." Kathy was less passionate, but was in a mood to quarrel with her sister. Jessie saw it and left the room, shutting the door behind her. Kathy flung it open and shouted after her: "You are a stuffy, stuck up prig. You expect too much from people. There is nothing wrong with Markie, nothing at all." Jessie had gone to the piano, and now drowned her out with Chopin, dexterously played. From the doorway Kathy made a face. Jessie smiled in return; Markie has demoralized us all with his spaniel-like hunger for approval, she thought. It is dangerous to have people about who do not have the courage to love themselves. The music became an end in itself. After a time she recovered her chain of thought. That is my vice, she thought, I escape into music. I mustn't be evasive, like Mummy. I must face things. I must do Markie in. The phrase had too murderous a ring and she hastened to qualify it. I must do Markie in Mummy-wise, Mummy-wise, that is all. She began to play again, a Haydn sonata. Anna Groener came in blazing eyed to make a row with her for upsetting Kathy and making her cry, but after a few seconds surrendered to the music, sat down and was presently beaming. Jessie played on, feeling powerful. When she had finished, she spun round on the piano stool and faced the German woman. "Anna, am I very wicked and bad? You came in to tell me so didn't you? Could I play Haydn so well if I were the evil thing you think me?" "You've been a fiend in human shape ever since your mother sent you to that frightful French school," Anna said. Jessie went over to her and hugged her. Anna stroked her hair. "Why do you torment Kathy so, by talking to her about things she can't possibly understand?" "Kathy is such a goose, Anna." "Now, now," Anna said, "you should not be jealous of your sister." "Am I jealous of my sister, Anna?" "Yes, you silly creature, you have wanted your mother to yourself ever since she was born." "Oh, fiddle de dee," Jessie said. "I'm not going to let you get away with that sort of Freudian chit chat, Anna." Kathy came into the room. "You are a tattletale and I despise you," Jessie went on. "You are a stinker," replied Kathy. "You don't fool me for one minute." "You girls will be the death of me," cried Anna. "It is time you were sent to boarding schools, both of you." "Separate ones, I hope," said Jessie. Kathy burst into tears. Mrs. Welcome came into the apartment. "Oh dear Anna, what is all this about?" she said. Kathy flung herself upon her and clung. "What have you been up to Jessie?" Mrs. Welcome inquired. "Oh mother, it is all to do with our growing up," Jessie said, "there is no helping it." "I suppose there is not," Mrs. Welcome said helplessly. Anna shook her head and went off to the kitchen, disconsolately. "There should be a man in this house," she muttered as she went. Jessie heard her observation and agreed. And Markie was the obstacle to there being one, she thought, yes, it is up to me to do him in.

When Mrs. Welcome was next with Mr. Markus she said: "Jessie called me 'mother' yesterday. She has never done so before." "Well, she is growing up," Mr. Markus said. " 'Mummy' is a baby word. You wouldn't want her to go on with it forever." "I suppose you are right," Mrs. Welcome said. "She has changed so much lately. I hardly know her anymore. She used to tell me everything. But now I know nothing of what is going on in her mind." "You can thank your lucky stars for that," said Mr. Markus. "Whatever do you mean, Markie?" said Mrs. Welcome, with some indignation in her tone of voice. "Why simply," Mr. Markus thought hard, "that her development is taking a normal course. It's natural for her to break away at her age. It would be abnormal if she still confided in you, it would be all wrong." "I am not so sure of that," Mrs. Welcome said. She considered Mr. Markus, who was dressed to go out for the evening in a brown silk suit, a brown and white gingham shirt, a brown bow tie, brown and white striped socks, and brown and white shoes. She recalled that her brother had given up referring to Mr. Markus as Ali Baba and now spoke of him as Mistah Bones. Of course, she thought, poor Markie would not know very much about what was normal or abnormal in the case of a girl with Jessie's background. "But perhaps you are right," she added, "though it would not have been so in my day." Mr. Markus let that issue go. "Jessie isn't by any means an ordinary girl," he said thoughtfully. "She is, that is, she has, a very special je ne sais quoi." Mrs. Welcome felt a vague disquiet. "Tell me, Markie," she said, "nothing happened, between you and Jessie, up at the farm. Everything has seemed so different since then." "She is a child, Betty!" said Mr. Markus. "For heaven's sake." "You are being absurd, Markie," said Mrs. Welcome examining his heightened color with interest. "I meant was there some misunderstanding, some row, perhaps, a mere matter of hurt feelings, that I knew nothing about." "No," Mr. Markus said. "No. Rather the reverse. We got to know each other a great deal better than before, up there." It could mean the same thing, Mrs. Welcome thought, in the end. She stood up and looked in the glass to see if she was ready to go out. "I am getting old, Markie, do you know that?" she said, examining the corners of her eyes. "You have never been lovelier," he said, and standing up took her in his arms. She was aware of the extraordinary physical harmony which existed between them. "You are a great dear, Markie," she said, thinking, he is a habit with me, like smoking. I don't believe I could do without him, now. He looked at his watch. "We must run," he said. "They are keeping a table for us at the Chambord." "Oh Markie, you spoil me," she said. That, too, was part of it.

Several times during that year Jessie said to herself, I am biding my time. It was her way of admitting to herself that she had no idea of how to bring about a breach between Markie and her mother. The season was dominated by her newly discovered admiration for Rimbaud and her friendship with a Greek shipowner's daughter who had not herself enjoyed a lover, but who had been confidante of a girl who had. "If our parents only began to realize how much we know!" her friend said. "My trouble is that I know about a great deal, but do not really know anything at all," Jessie said. The friendship failed to survive this moment of frankness. For Jessie, the dark weeks before Christmas were filled with loneliness, discontent, and impatience. "You have begun to play so coarsely, and so stupidly," her piano teacher said. "I can't make out what has happened to you. Perhaps I have been mistaken in thinking that you have a talent." She began to feel overshadowed by Kathy's gaiety and prettiness; dim and incompetent. I don't know where all my certainties have gone to, she thought. Her irritation with herself made the inconclusive drift of her mother's relationship with Markie more than ever intolerable to her: she felt it to be the sort of situation which could easily repeat itself in her own life if she allowed helplessness to grow on her. So after a few seconds she always followed up her remark about biding her time by another, to the effect that she must do something. "You really must wash your hair more often," said Mrs. Welcome, not understanding about Rimbaud. "You don't do yourself justice when you let it get in such a mess." "What goes on in my head counts for more than my appearance," Jessie said. "But people who don't know you can't tell anything about that, dear," Mrs. Welcome said, with a kindly intention.

They have got me down and they are kicking me, Jessie thought, well aware that she was being unreasonable, and feeling the worse for it.

One morning, when Jessie was thinking, oh God, in eleven more months I shall be eighteen and I am getting nowhere, Markie telephoned and was answered by Kathy. "Hello," she said, and then, "Oh, Markie, shall I call mother?" "No," he said, "not right away that is, now I want you. We have an anniversary. I only just discovered it. I was looking through some old diaries before I threw them out, and there it was. Guess what happened on this day, just ten years ago?" Kathy said she couldn't guess. She covered the mouthpiece and murmured to Jessie. "Markie is cooking something up, for today, stand by." She removed her hand. "Oh Markie. You have me all excited. What is it?" He laughed. "Well I'll tell you. It was ten years ago today that Betty first had me round to meet you girls. How about a lunch to commemorate the great event? Just me and you two. Put on your best bibs and tuckers . . ." Kathy had the mouthpiece covered, she kicked Jessie to get her attention. "He is asking us both to lunch," she said. "Shall I say 'yes'?" "I suppose," Jessie said. "Though I can't say that I am altogether in the mood for Markie." "You are never in the mood for anything or anybody these days," snapped Kathy, going on to say to Markie: "Jessie says that would be wonderful." Markie's small, disembodied, far away voice said, "That's just great. Only I have to wait for this call from Hong Kong . . ." "How exciting, how romantic!" cried Kathy. "Hell no," said Markie. "It isn't romantic at all. It's about plimsolls, gymshoes, sneakers to you, for shipment to Accra. But the thing is that I can't leave the apartment until the call comes through. So we'll have to eat here. I'll have some food sent in, we'll have a feast. Come along about one o'clock, O.K.? And now get me your mother, sweetie."

Markie had a very good meal for them. It began with enough caviar and a vintage champagne. Markie had a great many little jokes to make about all the growing up the girls had done since he had known them. "You are very silent, miss," Markie said to Jessie, who was taking a back seat and watching the skillful manner in which Kathy played up to him. "It is a phase I am going through," she said. "Well, if it's any comfort to you I can tell you your silences have a way of being as disconcerting as your pointed remarks used to be," he said. "You shouldn't be listening for them," Jessie said. "Touché. That was quite in your old manner," he said smiling at her. He went on, "I have tickets for the matinee of this new English musical. If the call doesn't come through in time for me to make the curtain, I'll send you on by yourselves and join you at the first interval . . ." "Oh no, Markie, we'll wait with you," cried Kathy. "That would be pointless," he said. He was making coffee. The telephone rang. When he had identified himself there was a pause while the operator called his far off business partner to the other end of the line. "Look," Markie said, hurriedly, "because I only realized what an important day this was this morning, I didn't have any time to get you girls suitable presents." A voice spoke to him from the telephone. "One second," he said to it, and added, "So do this, will you. Go to the treasure drawer in that bureau in the next room, the drawer with all the bits and pieces in it I brought back from China, you know the one I mean, and each of you pick out any one thing you'd like to have, and it's yours. Go on now." He waved them off, almost impatiently. "Parsons? Is that you? Georgie boy? How about those ruddy plimsolls, old man? Can they let us have them in the right quantities and the right colors at our figure? Or is it a case of no-can-do?" He became absorbed in some fuller explanation from far away Parsons. The girls left him to it. Although the treasure drawer had been disgorging its small wonders for them for all the years in which they had known Markie, it seemed to be as full as ever of large and small boxes. Kathy knelt to rummage among them with a purposeful expression on her face. Under the third lid she found a nest of tissue paper holding a dozen barbarically sophisticated rings set with semiprecious stones. She began to slip them on and off her fingers. "Aren't you interested?" she said. "They're too splendid for me," Jessie said, pointing to a larger box. "Try that." Kathy opened it and murmured an "oh pooh," and said "Not my line." "But perhaps mine," Jessie said holding out her hand. "Curios that are just curious don't mean a thing to me," Kathy said. She returned to the rings. She spread her fingers like the ribs of a fan, knitting her brows and staring with concentration at a water worn pebble of lapis lazuli which had been set in a ring of red gold. "Big stones on my fingers make my great hands look smaller," she said, "and the blue is just right." "If you aren't afraid of looking arty . . ." murmured Jessie, looking into her box, which was filled with miracles of inane craftsmanship, ivory fretted at and fussed at with inexhaustible patience and immense skill so that one filigree ball enclosed another, two, three, and even four of them revolving freely inside an outer shell. "I wonder why anyone should bother," she said, and stopped in mid-sentence. Five of the six balls were elaborately conventional, their pierced surfaces crawling with writhing vines which were made to seem to have woven themselves through a geometrical latticework. The sixth had an exterior of what appeared to be basketwork broken by four windows or peep holes round whose frames bats of happiness flittered in a rhythmic repeat pattern. Looking in at one of these apertures, Jessie saw that the surfaces of the two inner globes were covered with naked figures happily occupied with the act of love, performed in every conceivable fashion, and some ways not readily credible. "What were you saying?" Kathy asked. "Oh nothing," Jessie said, "I think I will settle for one of these pieces of nonsense." "They seem drearily pointless to me," Kathy objected. "You can't wear them or do anything with them. But that is your funeral. I like my showy ring." "I will look on my choice as a conversation piece," Jessie said, wondering if Markie would put on his spectacles to inspect their selections. But there was no difficulty there. He came through to them from telephoning saying "If we rush we can just make that curtain, so if you're ready pull on your coats and let's go." "You are an adorable Markie," Kathy said. "Look at this gorgeous ring you've given me!" He saw its blue flash and said "You have a flair, child. That's your ring. That blue is terrific for you." He turned to Jessie. "Did you find anything you liked?" She held the fretted ball cupped in her hand so that shadow filled it, and kept her hand close to her bosom beneath her downturned face. "My passion for small scaled complexities made me pick one of these," she said. "They are kind of fun," he said. A memory stirred in his mind. "Some of them have the darndest things inside them. I saw a few in Canton that were really bizarre. I thought of bringing one or two back, but I didn't think I'd get them through customs." He has forgotten, thought Jessie, that he decided to risk it with one of the bizarre ones. She lifted her face with a smile round her lips. "It is amazing to think of such patience," she said sleepily. Markie saw her as a woman for the first time; she is going to be the beauty, he thought, she will be the femme fatale. "Anyone who wants the bathroom had better go," he said. "But hurry." They were not late at the theatre.

Jessie was brushing her hair at the mirror in her room and Mrs. Welcome was sitting on her bed talking to her about whether she should go to college or to Juilliard when she noticed the ivory globe. She picked it up. She said: "You will find yourself among such a very different set of people." She was examining the exterior of the object. "I suppose you have it in mind that at Radcliffe I would be more likely to meet the kind of man you would like me to marry," Jessie said. "Well dear," Mrs. Welcome said, "it is the time in your life when lasting friendships are to be made, and the world of music is a very special one. It is not like any other." Watching her in the glass, Jessie saw her eye approach one of the windows in the side of the globe. Mrs. Welcome fell silent and shook the ball slightly two or three times. "I incline to like musicians," Jessie said. "There is some purpose in their lives." "Oh, yes," Mrs. Welcome said. "But the life is so fiercely competitive . . ." her voice died away. "Oh!" she said. Jessie guessed that she had discovered that the inmost globes were devoted to groups of figures strangely interlocked. "I am not sure that I approve of this new possession of yours," Mrs. Welcome said. "Do you really understand what is going on?" "I think so," Jessie said. "How on earth do you come to have such an object?" Mrs. Welcome seemed to be distressed; she had taken the globe away from her eye and was now holding it at some distance from her body, contemplating it with astonishment. "Markie let me have it," Jessie said. "Markie!" said Mrs. Welcome. "Yes, Mummy. He let us choose anything we wished from his collection of treasures. I chose that because it was so informative about a matter I know very little about. There is all this talk nowadays about sex education, but it does not tell one very much." Mrs. Welcome looked sad and continued to stare at the globe. "I suppose I have not been a great help to you there," she said. Jessie went to sit beside her and gave her a hug. "You have been a great dear. I am not at all afraid or apprehensive." "Well that is the main thing I suppose," Mrs. Welcome said, adding: "there is so much that can't be explained." A hint of anger came into her voice. "I simply can't understand what Markie can have been thinking of, to let such a thing as this fall into your hands." "I expect he had forgotten all about it," Jessie said. "He probably had no idea that it was there." "He had no right to be so careless. Suppose Kathy had found it . . . you haven't let her see it have you?" Jessie avoided this dangerous corner. "She dismissed it as the sort of thing which didn't interest her. She couldn't use it as an ornament or try it on." "You are not always fair to Kathy," Mrs. Welcome said. "I would not like her to see it, she is still so very young." "So am I, for that matter," Jessie said with a suggestion of bitterness. "But I don't think it has done me any harm." She took the globe from her mother and made as if to look in at one of the small windows in its outer shell. "I would rather you did not do that, not while I am here in the room with you at any rate," Mrs. Welcome said. Her face assumed a troubled expression. "There are aspects of life which I prefer to keep at arm's length. I don't wish to be made to think of them unless it is really necessary for me to do so." "You don't mean to say, do you, that there is something unpleasant about sex?" Jessie asked. "I have gathered," she rapped the globe, "that the correct line is that all this sort of thing is to be taken as healthy and natural." "There is nothing wrong with sex," Mrs. Welcome said with asperity. "But it is an exceedingly unpleasant subject." "I can see what you might mean by that," Jessie said. She put the globe down on her bedside table. "If you must keep that thing, I think the place for it is in a drawer," remarked Mrs. Welcome. There was a pause while Jessie put the object away out of sight among a collection of belts, scarves, old necklaces, and other oddments. While she was doing so Mrs. Welcome spoke, absently, as if to herself. "There is a side to Markie that I have never liked," she said. She stood up and began to touch the artificial flowers standing in a dry pot on a small table by the bed with the tips of her long thin fingers. "I don't know that I like these plastic things they are making now, they are so real. The silly paper ones they used to make were like toys, I think I preferred them. There is something—I don't know—over serious, perhaps, about such realism." Jessie ran a piece of Thai silk between her fingers, maintaining an appearance of detachment and innocence with difficulty. "I think we might go to Europe this summer," Mrs. Welcome said. "Yes, it is time you girls had a European summer, high time. We will go to France in June and then on into Italy. I will see if I can get a villa by the sea. We need a change; it will do us all good." "Oh, mother, that will be gorgeous," Jessie said, going over to her mother and hugging her. A tear ran down Mrs. Welcome's cheek. Jessie felt remorse; she said: "If you don't want to face being uprooted . . ." Mrs. Welcome removed the trace of the tear's passage with a bent finger. "That's absurd—no—I was just remembering how long ago my own first trip to Europe was, and how young I was then. We'll have a lovely time." Jessie thought: well, so that's done, how could I ever have believed that it would be difficult?

Kathy sent postcards to Markie from all over Europe, and he wrote to her twice. Kathy said to Jessie: "What is this stuff of Markie's, about always being fond of me? It is as if he thought we had parted forever." Jessie, leaning out of the window and looking down onto the sidewalks of the Rue Castiglione, did not turn her head. She said: "Well it will be different, being friends with him, now that mother has gone off him." "You mean it's all over, like that, after all these years? Oh poor, poor Markie," said Kathy. She went to the dressing table glass and began brushing her hair, staring into her own blue eyes with an expression of intensity while she did so. "When I start to live my own life," she said, "I shall always try to be fair to my men." Jessie said, "What?" turning away from the window. Kathy said: "Poor, poor Markie. He must be miserable." "He will get over it," Jessie said in a confident tone. As she spoke she recalled Markie's popeyed stare, his high color, his tendency to explode into agitation. She braced herself with the thought that men do not die of such things, and changed the subject. "You will always be able to come to cry on my shoulder. I promise to be very sympathetic." "What about?" Kathy seemed lost. "Why, when you've tried being fair to men," Jessie said. Kathy dangled her hair brush by its handle, pouting doubtfully. "I am not sure about which of us will be doing the weeping," she said. "I don't know how far this racket of being so razor sharp and onto things will take you. I have my doubts of it." "Well, I have none," Jessie said. "I am through with doubts." She was flexing her fingers. "I am longing to get back to that piano."

Mrs. Welcome had never really been able to think of herself as a Welcome. Whenever any matter of family came up she said: "We are Masons." The Masons were a clan rather than a family, and they spoke of themselves as the Masonry. When Mason women looked at babies with any suspicion of brown in their eyes or hair, who were inside the web of cross cousinship, they would say in delight: "Ah yes, you can't fool me, I'd know a black Mason anywhere." It was a Scotch strain which they were claiming to recognize. Alternatively they would say, with just as much pleasure: "My stars, you don't have to look twice to tell a golden Mason, do you?" Young Mason mothers pushing prams or strollers to or from the park in the East Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties were often stopped in the street by gray haired elderly ladies with fresh complexions and twinkles in their clear eyes. "You won't know me, but I know who you are! You're Ellen Mason's Harriet grown up. I'm Susan Crowhurst—your mother's first cousin—I was Susan Mason until I married. I see you've got a real black Mason here!" Masons ran into each other all the time on ferries going over to poison ivy covered summer islands Down East, and in the streets leading to museums in foreign towns, and they knew each other instantly by the Mason look, and by the uniform of not very fashionable, not very dowdy, cool gray and beige clothes. They met, too, at the ritual flockings, turning out in force at christenings, marriages, and memorial services. There would be Masonry parties after the church ceremonies, at which the in-Masons would case the new out-Masons—the men who had married Mason girls—and examine each other for the scorings of time's harrow. When Markie disappeared, some instinct told every single Mason that he was gone; they all seemed to know simultaneously. Mrs. Welcome and the girls ran into Masons all over Europe: in the forecourt of the Louvre; in Lyons; in front of the Duomo in Florence; at the foot of the Spanish steps in Rome; and in front of the Velasquez of the tapestry workers in Madrid. "It's just great to see you looking so well, Betty," they said, and that was all about that. When Mrs. Welcome came back to New York it was full of Masons, all anxious to see her, because "it's been such an age." It wasn't so much a taking back as a matter of celebrating an emergence from a period of voluntary non-existence. Kathy loved it. "They're all such bores," Jessie said. "I think they're just sweet," Kathy said. "They're all so good natured, and so easy to get on with. I mean, everything suddenly seems so simple about meeting people and liking people." And eighteen months after Markie had gone Kathy married a very distant cousin, as golden a Mason as she was, who worked in Wall Street. Six months after that Mrs. Welcome married Timmy Dowson. All the Masonry came to both weddings, and there were big turnouts of the clan every time one of Kathy's golden Mason babies was christened. Mrs. Dowson just adored all of them, and Timmy showed his perfect teeth as he smiled at her with amused affection while she doted. He went to England once a year to have two suits made, and he had never had a day in bed in his life. He had been considered for an important job in Roosevelt's second administration, and had been at SHAEF in London during the war. Mrs. Dowson was very happy with him, and he was very kind and considerate to her. Jessie moved into an apartment of her own during her mother's engagement; there was nothing in it at the end of five years but an enormous grand piano, a big ugly sofa, two arm chairs, an enormously expensive hi-fi set, a card table and a double bed. The woman who came in once a week never got the place quite clean. It was in Jessie's lease that she could practice after 10 A.M. and until eleven in the evening. The two girls in the next apartment who had office jobs would hammer on the wall at five minutes past the hour if she were still playing. There was always a pile of old magazines and newspapers which Jessie had been meaning to throw out for some time in one corner of the kitchenette. Mrs. Dowson sometimes cried when she had been to see Jessie at the apartment. Timmy would pat her on the back gently then, saying, "You mustn't mind. It's the way young people like to live nowadays. They don't care about the things we care about."

After Kathy's fourth child had been christened, the Masonry who had gathered to watch the event spilled slowly down the steps of St. Jean Baptiste onto Lexington Avenue, breaking up into groups, shaking hands, smiling a great deal in their pleasure at being so many and all such friends. There were Episcopalian Masons and Roman Catholic Masons, but that created no strain because religion was a personal matter which was never discussed. There had not been as much as a murmur when Kathy crossed over and became an R.C. Mason to please her husband. "Well it is rather a nice religion really," Kathy said. "I find it no strain." Jessie felt that it was all mumbo-jumbo while she was in the church, and when she walked out into the sunshine she wondered why she had come. She smiled and shook hands with a cousin who had been a friend at the Brearley school; they said that they must get together later in the summer. The cousin's husband said: "Who was the odd-ball in the black dress, the one who wasn't wearing make-up? Not one of us, surely." It was a standing joke that out-Masons were more royalist than the king. The answer was "Oh Jessie's a bit of a freak, but she's all right when you know how to take her." "Come round to our place darling," Mrs. Dowson said, touching Jessie's arm. "Kathy will be there, a few of the cousins will be dropping in, and Uncle John, and Willie, and George." "Well, perhaps," Jessie said. "We'll be seeing you in a few minutes then," Mrs. Dowson said, feeling sure that they would not. She went down the steps with Timmy. It was the first really hot day of spring and Jessie stood between the pillars by the doors feeling its kindness until her mother and stepfather had climbed into a cab and driven off.

Markie was driving down Lexington Avenue in a convertible. He looked up and saw Jessie standing alone in the middle of the dwindling crowd. He recognized that her promise of beauty had not been fulfilled, or rather that it had been cancelled out by the appearance of desperation and disquiet in her face. So that is what happened to her, he thought, and serves her right. Their eyes met. Jessie thought, why it is Markie, noticing how white his hair had become, that his face was redder, and his eyes more protuberant than ever. On an impulse she waved and smiled. Markie did not care for it and turned away, feigning indifference. He has not seen me, Jessie thought, regretfully, as the car moved forward in the jam of traffic. She had resigned herself to his disappearance when she saw the light at the corner changing. I will be able to catch him, she thought, and ran. Markie said, "I've no particular wish to talk to you," when she was sitting beside him in the car. "I wanted you to know how sorry I am, Markie," she said. "It's all water over the dam," he said. "It's important, Markie," she said. "It's too late now," he said. "I've given up thinking about it.

There's no point to dragging it up." The light turned to green. Markie drove on down the avenue. Jessie appealed to his profile. "I want you to forgive me, Markie," she said to it. Markie remained far off, behind his face. "I can't do anything without it," she said. "I am good at the piano, very good. But I am not making the grade as a concert pianist. I play well but my audiences don't like me. And my love life is terrible." "I should sympathize?" Markie said. "After what you did to me?" "Markie," Jessie said, "I only like Jewish boys. I mean I can't stand them if they aren't Jewish. And it doesn't work. I like them but they can't bear me. At least they won't stay with me." She put her hand on his arm but he shook it off with a brusque motion. "After a week or ten days we quarrel, and then they leave me," she said. "Your troubles don't interest me," Markie said, a vein throbbing at his temple. "They walk out on me," Jessie said. "I have been left five times—by men I was in love with, Markie. Do you understand what that means?" Markie's brilliant face was still closed against her. He wouldn't look in her direction. He said: "Leave me out of it. This is trouble with which I have nothing whatever to do. It's all some mess you've brought down on yourself." He pulled the handkerchief from his breast pocket and dabbed it like a pecking hen at his forehead, his cheekbones, and his lips. "I couldn't do anything for you, even if I was so inclined. What you need is an analyst, a psychiatrist, some kind of head shrinker." "It would help a lot if you would say that you had forgiven me, Markie," Jessie said. "That!" Markie said. "Never." There was a silence. "Oh Markie," Jessie said in an agony. "It would all have been so different if you had only been proud of being a Jew. That was all that was wrong." She became aware that he was staring at her; that his mouth was opening and shutting; that the car was standing close to the curb; that his hands were pushing at her; and that he was saying "Out! Out! Out!" She was on the sidewalk and his car was receding. She stood staring after it with tears streaming down her cheeks. In their embarrassment the passersby pretended not to notice her condition. Their downturned eyes, and their negative concern, not to be involved even to the extent of being aware of her distress, brought it home to her that she had become a spectacle. She took refuge in a cab. It proved to be full of the foul reek of a dead cigar which was clamped between the driver's ugly jaws, and which wagged up and down as folk wisdom was urged tediously past it: "There's no mileage in bawling, lady, leave me tell you. When you come to the end of a chapter, so, it's the end of a chapter. That's it. Turn the page and read on. There's no sense in anything else. You got to keep moving ahead." Jessie looked at the name under the driver's photograph: Hans Stucke, the name matching the face. She wished he would shut up.

Further downtown Markie felt increasingly impatient with himself for having come out in a hat so much too small for his head. Raising a hand to pluck it off, he swept his smooth hair and realized that he wasn't wearing a hat, that he hadn't, indeed, worn one in years. He pulled the car in to the curb, coming to rest to his vaguely felt satisfaction outside a drugstore. He began to swallow nitroglycerin pills, telling himself that it was nothing serious and noticing that everything in his field of vision appeared to have a wide black border. With a shock he became aware that he was feeling pain. It appeared to be located near his left armpit, and to be reaching down the arm, thrusting the flesh scaldingly from the bone as it groped for his wrist. He said "No!" and attempted to rise to his feet. Those pills aren't working as they should, he thought. It's all that girl's fault. I let her excite me. He saw that the black outlines of all the things in the world had begun to consume and blot them out, that they were melting into each other, and beginning to press suffocatingly in upon him. The last definable thoughts to come to him through that gathering, choking, darkness found expression in two ejaculations: "Alone!" and "In the street!"

Notes On the Authors

DONALD BARTHELME, who grew up in Houston, Texas, came to literary attention with his appearances in the early 1960's in *New World Writing, The New Yorker,* and *Harper's Bazaar.* He is the author of the story collections *Come Back Dr. Caligari, City Life,* and *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts,* and the novel *Snow White.*

SYLVIA BERKMAN, a member of the English Department at Wellesley College, made her first appearance as a short story writer with "Encore Il Pleut" in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1952. Since then, she has contributed stories to magazines here and in Europe, and been included in *Best American Short Stories.* She is the author of a biography of Katherine Mansfield, and *Blackberry Wilderness,* a collection of her stories, which has also been translated into German.

JORGE LUIS BORGES (Argentina) has come to be recognized as a major figure of world literature. Winner, with Samuel Beckett, of the International Publishers' Prize in 1961, he is the author of *Ficciones, Labyrinths, Dream Tigers, The Book of Imaginary Beings,* and *The Aleph and Other Stories.*

PAUL BOWLES, a native New Yorker who resides off and on in Tangiers and Ceylon, gained literary prominence with his first novel *The Sheltering Sky.* His later books include two novels, *Let It Come Down* and *The Spider's House;* a collection of stories, *The Delicate Prey,* and another of travel essays, *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue.*

WILLIAM BUTLER, originally from Portland, Oregon, has lived with his family in Japan since 1959. His novels include *The Experiment, The Butterfly Revolution,* and *The Ring in Meiji.*

DINO BUZZATI (Italy), journalist, novelist, and playwright, and winner of an Italian Academy Award, is chiefly known in America for his superior juvenile, *The Bears' Famous Invasion of Sicily,* and the novels *The Tartar Steppe* and *A Love Affair.*

HORTENSE CALISHER was recognized as an American writer of subtlety, power and compassion with her first collection of short stories, *In The Absence of Angels* (1952). Her books include two subsequent story collections, *Tale for the Mirror* and *Extreme Magic;* and the novels, *False Entry* and *Textures of Life.* Miss Calisher has twice been the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in writing.

PADDY CHAYEFSKY made his initial reputation with the television drama and the subsequent movie of *Marty*—which won the Academy Award here and the Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. Of his numerous works for television, the films, and the stage, *Bachelor Party, The Goddess, Middle of the Night, The Tenth Man, Gideon,* and *The Passion of Josef D.* have been published as books.

ANTON CHEKHOV (Russia), the progenitor of the modern short story, and the great master of the form, had written four hundred and fifty stories at his death in 1904. Two hundred were translated into English by Constance Garnett in her thirteen volume *The Tales of Tchekhov;* Avrahm Yarmolinsky's more recent *The Unknown Chekhov* brought twenty-six more stories and pieces into English. Chekhov's stories and his major plays—*Ivanov, Uncle Vanya, Three Sisters, The Cherry Orchard, The Seagull*—are the "twin pillars on which his great reputation rests."

COLETTE (France) died in 1954 at eighty-one, still at the top of her international eminence as the greatest woman writer of France. From her voluminous output, the works published in America include: *Break of Day; Cheri,* and *The Last of Cheri; Claudine at School, Claudine in Paris,* and *Claudine Married; Gigi; Chance Acquaintance; Julie de Carneilhan; The Ripening Seed;* and *The Blue Lantern,* her last major work.

CYRIL CONNOLLY, (Great Britain), a pre-eminent essayist and literateur, is the author of *The Rock Pool* (his first book and only novel), *The Unquiet Grave, The Condemned Playground, Memories of a Georgian Boyhood,* and *Previous Convictions; Selected Writings of a Decade.* He was, during its ten years of existence, the distinguished editor of England's honored literary magazine, *Horizon.*

MARIA DERMOÛT (Holland), who died in 1962 at the age of seventy-four, published her first book, *Yesterday,* at sixty-three, and her second, *Ten Thousand Things,* four years later. She had spent most of her life in Java, Celebes and the Molucca Islands, and it is in this setting that her tales and novels are laid.

ISAK DINESEN (Denmark), one of the rare great "natural" writers, won immediate and wide recognition with her *Seven Gothic Tales* and *Out of Africa. Winter Tales, The Angelic Avengers, Last Tales, Anecdotes of Destiny, Shadows on the Grass,* and *Ehrengard* are among her later works. In 1957, four years before her death, Isak Dinesen was made an honorary member of the American Academy and National Institute of Arts and Letters.

MAURICE DUGGAN (New Zealand) has been published in Austrogaea, France, and Eire. *Immanual's Land,* a collection of his stories, came out in New Zealand. "Guardian" was his first story to appear in America.

A. E. ELLIS (Great Britain) is the pseudonym of the author of *The Rack,* a novel which alerted critics here and in England, and elicited from Cyril Connolly the comment: "a work of sombre power and soaring comedy."

PIERRE GASCAR (France) was awarded the Prix Goncourt in 1953 for *Beasts and Men,* a collection of stories. His work has been translated into several languages, and includes three novels—*The Seed, The Coral Barrier, The Fugitive*—and a story collection, *Women and the Sun.*

NADINE GORDIMER (South Africa) has made her native country the scene basic to her lively, wise and deeply humane writing. A frequent contributor to *The New Yorker* and other notable magazines here and abroad, Miss Gordimer is the author of novels including *Occasion for Loving* and *A Guest of Honor,* and short story collections including *Six Feet in the Country* and *The Soft Voice of the Serpent.*

GRAHAM GREENE (Great Britain) is one of the few great living novelists, and possibly England's most versatile man of letters. His writings include novels—*The Power and the Glory, The Heart of the Matter, The End of the Affair, The Quiet American;* "entertainments"—*Brighton Rock, This Gun for Hire, Confidential Agent, The Ministry of Fear, The Third Man, Our Man in Havana;*

plays—*The Living Room, The Potting Shed, The Complaisant Lover;* and essays—*The Lost Childhood, Journey Without Maps.*

MARIANNE HAUSER (Alsace) has, for the past twenty years, been publishing in America, which has become her home. She is the author of the novels *Dark Dominion, The Choir Invisible,* and *Prince Ishmael;* and *A Lesson in Music,* a volume of short stories—several of which have also been anthologized.

TED HUGHES (Great Britain), primarily a Yorkshire poet, the author of *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal,* has also written compelling short stories published in English and American magazines.

EUGENE IONESCO (Rumania) is one of the foremost dramatists in the theatre's modern idiom (he rejects the term "Theatre of the Absurd"). He is the author of *The Bald Soprano, The Chairs, The Lesson, The New Tenant, The Killer, Rhinoceros, The Stroller in the Air,* and *The King Dies;* as well as a volume of writings on the theatre, *Notes and Counter Notes.*

CALVIN KENTFIELD, who was born in Iowa, and grew up near the Mississippi River, exhibits in all his writings a powerful attraction for the sea. A contributor to *The New Yorker* and *Harper's Bazaar,* he is the author of *The Alchemist's Voyage, All Men Are Mariners,* and *The Angel and the Sailor,* a volume of short stories.

FRANÇOISE MALLET-JORIS (Belgium), one of the most profoundly gifted of the younger French writers, is the author of novels including *The Illusionist, The Red Room, House of Lies, Café Celeste,* and *The Favourite*—of which the first, written before she was twenty, was a *succès de scandale;* and the fourth, a winner of the Prix Femina. Her *A Letter to Myself* is a recapitulation of her development as a writer and a woman; *Cordelia* is a collection of her stories.

P. H. NEWBY (Great Britain) is primarily a novelist, whose work ranges from the subtle, psychological manner of *The Retreat,* to the devastatingly comic idiom of *Picnic at Sakkara, Revolution and Roses* and *A Guest and His Going.* Newby has been the recipient of a Rockefeller Foundation Atlantic Award in Literature, and the Somerset Maugham Prize.

PATRICK O'BRIAN (West of Ireland) has for many years made his home in the south of France. He is the author of the novels *Testimonies* and *The Catalans*, and volumes of short stories.

FLANNERY O'CONNOR died in 1964 at the age of thirty-nine. A Southern writer, who rarely left her home in Milledgeville, Georgia, her direct, individual and universal vision of evil and of justice exempt her writing from the category of the regional. Miss O'Connor's first publication was in *Accent* when she was twenty. Her novels *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, and her short story collections *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* and *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, are a testament to her exceptional literary powers.

FRANK O'CONNOR (Ireland) is the pen name of Michael O'Donovan, whose easy, off-hand short story style is deceptive, and overlays a profound sense of the irony, comedy and pathos in ordinary human events. Among his multifarious writings are *Stories of Frank O'Connor; More Stories; Mirror in the Roadway*, a novel; *Domestic Relations; Only Child*, the first volume of his autobiography; *The Lonely Voice, A Study of the Short Story;* and *Shakespeare's Progress.*

V. S. PRITCHETT (Great Britain) is one of England's most exhilarating short story writers, as well as its dean of critics, and a travel essayist of perception and verve. His books include: *The Living Novel; Books in General; The Sailor, Sense of Humour and Other Stories; When My Girl Comes Home; The Offensive Traveller;* and *The Key to My Heart.*

JAMES PURDY is the celebrated author of stories including those collected in *Children is All* and *Color of Darkness;* the novels *Malcolm, The Nephew, Cabot Wright Begins, Eustace Chisholm and the Works,* and *Jeremy's Version.* Mr. Purdy has been the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in writing, and a National Institute of Arts and Letters award.

SUSAN SONTAG was born in New York, and grew up in Arizona and California. She is the author of the novels *The Benefactor* and *Death Kit,* and several volumes of critical essays. She also wrote the screenplay for and directed a film, *Duet for Cannibals.*

TERRY SOUTHERN, a Texan by birth, was first published in Paris in *New Story* and in *Paris Review;* subsequently, three stories ran in *Harper's Bazaar*. The author of the novels *Flash and Filigree* and *The Magic Christian,* Mr. Southern also collaborated on the film scripts for *Dr. Strangelove* and Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One.*

JOHN STEINBECK, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, was one of America's boldest and most versatile authors. Among his books: *The Red Pony, Of Mice and Men, Tortilla Flat, The Grapes of Wrath, Cannery Row, East of Eden, The Moon is Down,* and *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*. He died in 1968.

JAMES STEPHENS (Ireland) was born in Dublin in 1882, on the same day, at the same hour, and in the same city as his closest friend, James Joyce. A distinguished member of the Gaelic Renascence, Stephens was a spokesman for the Irish spirit: its myths, leprechauns, and wit. *The Crock of Gold* is still a celebrated classic; *Collected Poems* represents Stephens' own review and emendation of his verse; and *James, Seumas and Jacques* is a recent collection of his occasional essays and fables.

DYLAN THOMAS (Wales), the great lyric poet, died in 1953 at the age of thirty-nine. Thomas' works are: *Adventures in the Skin Trade, A Child's Christmas in Wales,* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (three collections of stories); *Quite Early One Morning* (a collection of stories, sketches and essays); *Under Milk Wood; A Play for Voices; Letters to Vernon Watkins;* and *Collected Poems,* a selection made by the poet the year before his death.

NAKAJIMA TON (Japan), who died in 1942 at the age of thirty-three, was a student of classical Chinese, and of English, French and German literature. He became best known for his *Light, Wind, and Dream,* published the year of his death.

ANTHONY WEST, the novelist, essayist and critic, has been a staff writer with *The New Yorker* since coming to America from England in 1950. Among his novels are *The Vintage, Another Kind, Heritage,* and *The Trend is Up. Principles and Persuasions* is a collection of essays; and *Blood Was Their Argument* is a dissection of the English failure in dealing with the Irish problem. Mr. West became an American citizen in 1955.

“The short story

is a hybrid. It owes much to the quickness, the objectivity and cutting of the cinema; it owes much to the poet on the one hand and the newspaper reporter on the other; something also to the dramatic compression of the theater, and everything to the restlessness, the alert nerve, the scientific eye and the short breath of contemporary life.” So says V. S. Pritchett in his introductory essay. Alice S. Morris has collected 35 stories by contemporary masters of the form, all published first under her editorship in *Harper’s Bazaar.*

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